



Get cultured about yoghurt

Yoghurt is a popular, low-fat, tasty and healthy product. With the range of different types and brands of yoghurts consumers can choose from, it is important to know what high-quality yoghurts look, taste and smell like. Karien Slabbert spoke to Norman Robertson, a well-known dairy specialist, about how to pinpoint quality yoghurts using a set of basic guidelines.

An age-old tradition

Yoghurt is one of the oldest forms of fermented milk. In the Middle East and countries bordering the Mediterranean, it has been used since at least 5 000 BC. Modern yoghurt is a custard-like dairy product that is obtained from lactic acid fermentation by adding *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* to properly

pasteurised or concentrated milk. Yoghurt can also include ingredients such as:

- Cream or various forms of milk-based products
- Sweetening agents (lactose, sucrose, invert sugar, etc)
- Flavouring agents
- Stabilisers and emulsifiers.

Types of yoghurt

Modern-day consumers can choose from several types of yoghurt. According to Robertson, the following are the best known varieties of yoghurt:

- **Set yoghurt** is incubated and cooled in its retail package
- **Stirred yoghurt** is incubated in bulk, stirred and cooled down before it is packaged in retail containers
- **Drinking yoghurt** is similar to stirred yoghurt, but has a lower total percentage of solids



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TABLE 1: Sensory attributes of stirred, flavoured yoghurt

Appearance	Colour	Body and texture	Flavour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No whey separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smooth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typical of the stated flavour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No white specks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pleasant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smooth, porcelain-like surface 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pleasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderately firm or custard-like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not too sour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh appearance, smell and taste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristic of the stated flavour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viscous (thick) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No unpleasant aftertaste
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient amount of added ingredients 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When looking at a side profile of the yoghurt on a spoon, it should be moderately mounted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slight acidic taste

- Frozen yoghurt** is incubated in bulk tanks, whereafter it is frozen like ice-cream
- Concentrated yoghurt** is incubated in tanks, concentrated and cooled down before it is packaged
- Yoghurt with added live AB-cultures** contains live bacteria that are naturally found in the human intestinal tract. AB-cultures are widely revered for their gastro-intestinal health attributes
- Sundae-style yoghurt** is similar to set yoghurt. During the production process, fruit and other flavourings are placed in the bottom of the yoghurt container
- Swiss-style yoghurt** is similar to stirred yoghurt, and the flavouring and/or fruit is blended uniformly throughout the yoghurt base.

Sensory attributes of yoghurt

Consumers can distinguish between high- and lower quality yoghurts by looking at the product's appearance, palatability, flavour, good consistency and viscosity and whether there is any whey separation. The characteristics of a quality stirred flavoured yoghurt are shown in *Table 1*.

When choosing drinking, natural and flavoured yoghurts, consumers can also use the above table as a basic guideline, Robertson says. However, drinking yoghurt should be drinkable through a straw and natural yoghurt should have a characteristic, pleasantly sour taste, he says.

Defects in yoghurt

According to Robertson, consumers should look out for the following defects that may occur in low-quality yoghurt. When yoghurt is no longer fresh, or the packaging is damaged, a film forms on the product's surface. Other indications that the product is no longer fresh, are when the packaging bulges due to gas formation.

The yoghurt should not have an artificial and unnatural colour. Furthermore the product is not up to standard if the colour is not suggestive of the stated flavour. For example, strawberry fruit yoghurt should have a rich, pink colouring. Other indications of a sub-standard product, Robertson points out, include:

- The colour has drained away from the fruit particles, and has made a pigment trail throughout the yoghurt
- The yoghurt's colouring is not spread evenly or the product is pale
- There are visible water droplets inside the packaging due to large fluctuations in storage temperature
- Fat separation due to insufficient homogenisation
- Too little or no visible fruit
- The yoghurt has a rancid, soapy taste
- The yoghurt lacks fine flavour. **M&JR**