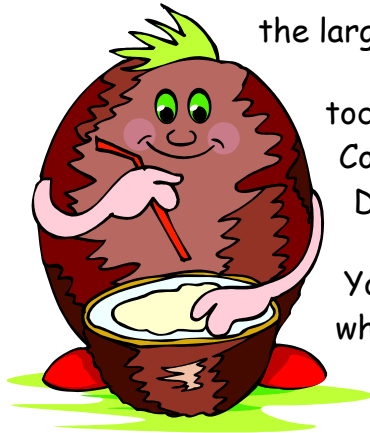


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Your child learned about...



the largest seed known (a popular flavor delight) a coconut

today with a guest speaker from the Seneca County  
Cornell Cooperative Extension and 4-H Youth  
Development Program.

Your child participated in the following learning task  
which they will enjoy telling you about:

#### How to Enjoy a Coconut with the Help of an Adult

1. Wash your hand with warm, soapy, running water before working with food.
2. With the help of an adult open a coconut. Remove the meat of the coconut and grate it. (Directions in this handout.)
3. Have an adult help you make a delicious fruit cup using the grated coconut to add a sunny tropical flavor.
4. Enjoy !!!



# Coconut

## Coconut history

The English name *coconut*, first mentioned in English print in 1555, comes from Spanish and Portuguese word *coco*, which means "monkey face." Spanish and Portuguese explorers found a resemblance to a monkey's face in the three round indented markings or "eyes" found at the base of the coconut.



Coconuts are the fruit of the coconut palm, botanically known as *cocos nucifera*, *nucifera* with meaning "nut-bearing." The fruit-bearing palms are native to Malaysia, Polynesia and southern Asia, and are now also prolific in South America, India, the Pacific Islands, Hawaii and Florida. The light, fibrous husk allowed it to easily drift on the oceans to other areas to propagate. In Sanskrit, the coconut palm is known as *kalpa vriksha*, meaning "tree which gives all that is necessary for living," since nearly all parts of the tree can be used in some manner or another. The coconut fruit has many food uses for its milk, meat, sugar, and oil. It also functions as its own dish and cup. The husk was burned for fuel by natives, but today a seed fibre called *coir* is taken from the husk and used to make brushes, mats, fishnets, and rope. Coconut oil, a saturated fat made from dried coconut meat, is used for commercial frying and in candies and margarines, as well as in non-edible products such as soaps and cosmetics. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends using a limited amount of saturated fat in your family's daily diet.

Although it takes up to a year for coconuts to mature, the trees bloom up to thirteen times a year, so fruit is constantly forming yielding a continuous harvest year-round. An average harvest from one tree runs about 60 coconuts, with some trees yielding three times that amount. The coconut's name is a bit of a misleading, since its true botanical classification is a drupe and not a nut. It is the largest seed known.

## Coconut availability



Peak months for fresh coconuts are October through December, but it can be found year-round in many markets. Most markets will display fresh coconuts already removed from the outer husk, stripped down to the hard dark-brown shell with the three distinctive circular indentations at the base end.

If you do not have access to fresh coconut, you can find dried, grated, flaked or toasted coconut in packages or cans usually in the area where cake-baking supplies are sold. Shredded coconut has less than 3 percent moisture content and about 68 percent oil. It is also sold frozen, in the freezer cases as well as in both sweetened and unsweetened forms.

If you are lucky enough to have a coconut palm, you can also enjoy green coconuts. Young green coconuts at about six months of age have a gelatinous center, with a texture similar to a melon, which can be scooped out with a spoon. It has a fresh, fruity almost nutty flavor, not overly sweet.

### **What is coconut milk?**

If you've ever opened a fresh coconut, you will have seen the thin, opaque almost clear coconut juice or water which has a slight almond flavor. Contrary to popular belief, this is *not* the coconut milk. However, the coconut water is consumed as a drink fresh from the coconut by many, and it can also be used in recipes. Coconut milk is actually a combination of equal parts of shredded coconut and water, simmered and then strained through cheesecloth, squeezing out as much of the pulp as possible. You can find canned coconut milk and cream in most markets along with canned fruit juices. Do not confuse sweetened "cream of coconut" (used for desserts and mixed drinks) with unsweetened coconut milk or cream.

### **Coconut selection and storage**

Choose coconuts that feel heavy for their size, having no cracks and avoid those whose circular indented eyes are damp, moist or moldy. Shake the coconut. It should slosh with liquid and sound full. Once opened, the meat is separated from the hard shell and the dark skin is pared off if desired.

Fresh unopened coconuts can be stored at room temperature for up to four months, depending on its original freshness when purchased. Grated fresh coconut should be put in a tightly sealed container or plastic bag and stored in the refrigerator for up to four days or frozen for up to six months. Unopened canned coconut can be stored at room temperature for up to eighteen months. Packaged coconut in plastic bags can be stored up to six months at room temperature.



Once opened, canned and packaged coconut should be refrigerated and used quickly, within five to seven days for canned and within three to four weeks for dried. The high oil content makes coconut quickly turn rancid if not stored under the proper conditions. One medium-sized fresh coconut will yield 3 to 4 cups grated or flaked coconut and 1 cup of liquid. Do not pack tightly when measuring grated or flaked coconut. If shredded coconut becomes dry, soak it in milk for 30 minutes, then drain off the milk and pat dry with paper towels. You can use the drained milk in recipes or blended drinks within 5 days.

### **Step 1. Draining the coconut water from the nut.**

In order to drain the liquid from the coconut (coconut water) you obviously need to make a hole in the nut. The easiest way to do this is with a pair of scissors. Using one blade of the scissors (see the photo) probe the three "eyes" on the end of the coconut until you locate the soft one. Then use the scissor blade to ream a hole in this eye. You should easily be able to make a large enough hole to drain the coconut. Drain the coconut water into a glass. If it has a sweet coconut smell, take a sip of it to check the taste. If it has a sweet fresh coconut taste, proceed to Step 2. (Refrigerate the coconut water for later use if you'd like.) If it smells or tastes sour or moldy, there is no Step 2. Breaking point in proceeding; return it to the market for another nut or a refund.



## **Step 2. Open the Coconut to Remove the Meat.**

Open the coconuts by flinging them onto a cement or rock surface (this is how the monkeys do it!) Don't worry about losing the liquid, as it's not the coconut milk called for in cooking. Each coconut should break in 3 to 4 pieces. A more practical (neighbor friendly) way to open a coconut is by piercing the eyes of the coconut with a screwdriver or ice pick, draining the liquid through the holes and placing the coconut in a 400 degrees F oven for 20 minutes. Wrap the coconut in a towel and hit it with a hammer to loosen the shell and split it into pieces.

Pry out the white meat and then pare off the dark skin.

## **Grating Coconut Meat:**

To grate the white meat, put the meat through the grating disk of a food processor or use a hand grater. You should get about 7 cups of grated coconut from the two coconuts.

## **Angle Flake Coconut Triple Fresh Fruit Parfaits**

2/3 cup each raspberries, sliced strawberries, blueberries

2 containers strawberry fat-free yogurt

¼ cup angel flaked coconut

24 reduced fat vanilla wafers, coarsely chopped

6 tablespoons "lite" whipped topping

6 whole strawberries

MIX raspberries, sliced strawberries and blueberries in a medium bowl. Add yogurt and coconut; toss to coat.

PLACE half of the chopped wafers in 6 parfait style cups; cover with half the fruit mixture. Repeat layers.

TOP with the whipped topping and whole strawberries. Serve immediately. Or, cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.



## **Tropical Treat**

1 can (11 oz.) mandarin orange segments, drained

1 cup low fat cottage cheese

1 can (8 oz.) pineapple, crushed or chunks, drained

1 medium banana, sliced

2 tablespoons angel flake coconut

TOSS all ingredients together in a medium bowl. Serve immediately. Or, cover and refrigerate until ready to serve. Great substitute: Use peach slices, canned or fresh in place of mandarin oranges.

