

Cooking With Coconut

In Sanskrit, it's called *kalpa vriksha*, which means "the tree that provides all the necessities of life," and in Malay, *pokok seribu guna* describes "the tree of a thousand uses." In the Philippines, it is called simply "the tree of life."





Valued by cultures throughout the world, the coconut palm is one of the most useful and economically valuable trees because every part can be used to produce a number of products. From the white fleshy piece of the seed utilized in cooking to the outer fibrous husk used for making ropes and mats, more than 10 million families in 90 countries depend on this hearty crop for food and income.

Facts

Rich in fiber, vitamins and minerals, the coconut is classified as a functional food by dietitians due to its many healthful benefits. A number of ailments can be treated with coconut, including asthma, burns, fever, toothaches and ulcers, and modern medicine confirms its range of cures. Coconut oil, especially, is known as being the healthiest oil on Earth, composed primarily of medium-chain fatty acids recommended by physicians. In fact, the coconut, along with the olive, are the earliest recorded sources of vegetable oil.

To open a coconut, first remove the outer husk, if it has not been removed already. Pierce two of the three eyes, and drain the juice. Coconuts have a natural fracture point and can be opened by hitting them with the flat edge of a heavy knife, or by using a flathead screwdriver and a hammer. Work around the coconut until the crack splits the entire fruit.

In the kitchen

One coconut yields nutritious fleshy meat and coconut water that can be used to create coconut milk and cream, as well as to flavor various dishes. Commonly used in Asian and Pacific Island cuisines,

coconut is being incorporated into many entrées as an exotic, yet healthy addition. Maroma Resort and Spa in Riviera Maya, Mexico, features Seafood Ceviche in Fresh Coconut as an appetizer. The Oriental Chicken Salad with ginger coconut-marinated chicken at The Spa at Charleston Place in Charleston, South Carolina, has a light, exotic taste. For the main course, Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay in Bali, Indonesia, prepares its Indonesian Vegetable Curry with Tofu and Cashew Nuts in a Yellow Coconut Sauce. And for dessert, indulge with Coconut Short Cake Pudding served with young coconut ice cream and citrus syrup at Banyan Tree Spa Phuket in Phuket, Thailand. Also, see the recipe **Herbed Chicken Coconut Soup with Sliced Galangal**, known as *Tom Kha Gai*, courtesy of Chiva-Som International Health Resort in Bangkok, Thailand.

In the spa

Great for healing and repairing the skin, coconut also smells great—reminiscent of a tropical paradise. Nourish and moisturize with Aqua Dessa Spa Therapy's Coconut Milk Foam Shower Gel, made with organic virgin coconut. Jamu Asian Spa Rituals' Coconilla bath line features a coconut and vanilla island scent, as well as a Coconut Scrub. The tropical fruit blend in OPI's Avojuice Coconut Melon line softens with coconut and hydrates with melon. Finally, Joey New York's Coconut Oil Body Moisturizer combines coconut oil and kukui nut oil to richly revitalize dry, lifeless skin.

Quick Facts

- Because the three indentations on the furry fruit resemble the face of a monkey, early Spanish explorers called it *coco*, or “monkey face.”
- The origin of this plant is subject to debate. However, coconut fossils have been traced to New Zealand as far back as 15 million years ago, and also have been recovered in Rajasthan and Maharashtra, India.
- During World War II, coconut milk was used as a substitute for cow's milk.
- A coconut is the largest known seed in the world.
- Trained monkeys are used in some areas of the world to harvest coconuts. Training schools still exist in Thailand, and competitions are held to determine the fastest harvester.
- At one time, Pacific Islanders believed that the world was a large coconut.

Coconut commonly is used in combination with sugar as an excellent complement to a scrub, polish or nail treatment. Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay blends freshly shredded coconut and vanilla beans with coconut milk to gently polish the skin in its Coconilla Skin Scrub. Highlighting a traditional Balinese recipe of coconut, mungbean, spices and lavender, the Elemis Exotic Coconut Rub and Milk Ritual Wrap at Mandara Spa at Fiji's Sofitel Resort and Spa on Denarau Island, Fiji, polishes the skin while tantalizing the senses. Experience the South Pacific closer to home with the Fiji Island Sugar Glow at Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa in Phoenix, which exfoliates dry skin with coconut and raw sugar. Or treat your feet to the Fiji Botanical Fusion Foot Therapy—which begins with a soothing coconut milk foot soak—at Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort in Vanua Levu, Fiji.

Lime in the coconut

Cultivated for centuries, coconuts have been used in cuisine, skin care and even medicine. Transform a plain salad by sprinkling toasted coconut, or enhance a basic massage with exotic coconut oil. Incorporate one of the most-used plants around, and add a little taste of the tropics to your spa menu. ✕



Herbed Chicken Coconut Soup with Sliced Galangal (*Tom Kha Gai*)

From Executive Chef Paisarn Cheewinsiriwat at Chiva-Som International Health Resort in Bangkok, Thailand

Makes 4 servings

- 2 cups vegetable stock
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 3 tablespoons galangal, peeled and finely julienne sliced
- 3 tablespoons lemongrass, sliced finely diagonally
- 2 kaffir lime leaves, shredded and sliced
- 3 pieces birdseye chili, pressed
- 1 chicken breast, sliced into bite-size pieces
- 1 ounce oyster mushrooms, peeled or trimmed
- 1 ounce straw mushrooms, peeled and cut into wedges
- ½ ounce cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 tablespoons miso paste
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon red chili, seeded and sliced diagonally
- a tip of a coriander leaf

1. In a soup pan, bring vegetable stock and coconut milk to a boil.
2. Add galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves and birdseye chili, and simmer for several minutes.
3. Add chicken, mushrooms and cherry tomatoes, and cook for 4–5 minutes, until well done. Avoid overcooking, as chicken will become tough.
4. Remove from heat, and season with miso paste and lime juice.
5. To serve, garnish with red chili, kaffir lime leaves and coriander leaf tip.



Photo courtesy of Chiva-Som International Health Resort.

In the July 2006 issue, the featured recipe for Cherry Oatmeal Cookies was incomplete. For the correct instructions, please visit www.SkinInc.com. Skin Inc. magazine regrets this error.



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