



South Florida Tropicals: Coconut¹

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BACKGROUND

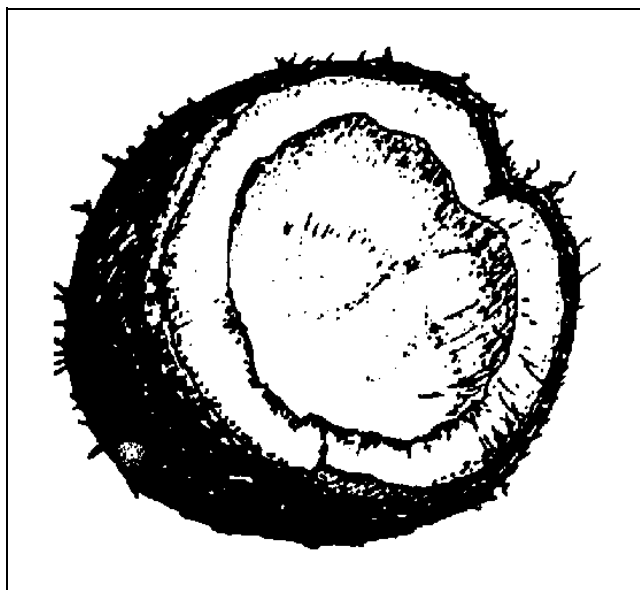


Figure 1.

The coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) is the seed of a coconut palm tree. Thought to be native to the Indo-Pacific area of the tropics, coconuts are grown

throughout the tropical world. The coconut is a drupe, composed of a fibrous husk (green when young, brown when mature), surrounding a hard stony shell. Enclosed within the shell is a white fleshy layer called the "meat." (See *Figure 1.*) Immature (young) fruit contain coconut liquid and the meat, if developed, is soft and jelly-like. Mature fruit have hardened coconut meat and less liquid.

AVAILABILITY

Fresh coconuts are available year round, with peak supplies from September to January.

SELECTION

Coconuts are sold both in the husk (tan or green-colored thick outer shell) or removed from the husk, with a fibrous dark brown shell. To buy a coconut without the heavy husk, check to be certain that the shell and its three eyes or softspots are dry, not moldy or wet. Either form of coconut should feel heavy and you should be able to hear the liquid sloshing inside when the fruit is shaken. For firm coconut meat, select mature coconuts with little or no liquid inside.

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STORAGE

Unopened coconuts may be stored in the refrigerator for several weeks. Check frequently for liquid content, since coconuts dry out as they age. Firm coconut meat will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 10 days, or may be frozen for 8 to 12 months. Freshly grated coconut will keep for 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator. Soft coconut meat and milk should be refrigerated and used within a day.

USES

Coconut, in its various forms, is used in many desserts, fruit salads and main dishes. Coconut can be used when fresh, dried, canned or frozen.

NUTRITIVE VALUE

The nutritive value of the coconut varies according to its stage of development. The mature coconut is a good source of iron. Approximately 86% of the calories in coconut are from fat, most of which is saturated fat. One cup shredded raw unsweetened coconut contains:

47% water
283 calories
3 grams protein
27 grams total fat
24 grams saturated fat
12 grams carbohydrate
2.6 mg. vitamin C
1.94 mg. iron
3 grams fiber
no cholesterol

See *Table 1* for comparisons of fat and cholesterol content between coconut and cow's milk. **NOTE:** In the table, coconut liquid refers to the liquid from the coconut; coconut "milk" refers to a liquid expressed from a mixture of grated coconut meat and water. The values in the table are for 1 cup servings.

YIELD

½ pound coconut yields approximately 3 cups grated.

Table 1.

	Saturated Fat (g)	Total Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)
Coconut liquid	0.42	0.48	0
Coconut milk	50.7	72.0	0
Whole milk (cow's)	5.1	8.0	33
1% milk (cows)	1.6	3.0	10
Dried, Shredded	29.3	33.0	0
Raw, Shredded	24.0	27.0	0

BASIC PREPARATION

- To remove the coconut meat from the shell, pierce one or more of the "eyes" with an ice pick. Drain coconut through a fine-meshed sieve to reserve liquid.
- Place the coconut in a 350°F. oven for 15 to 20 minutes; remove from oven. Firmly tap coconut with a hammer to crack open the shell. Continue tapping over the shell until cracked in several places. Remove as much of the shell as possible this way.
- Remove the meat by inserting a sharp knife between the meat and shell or score the flesh and lift from the edge.
- Remove brown tissue adhering to the meat prior to grating to maintain a snow white color. The easiest way to remove covering is with a knife or vegetable peeler while still warm.

FREEZING

- Peeled and washed whole pieces of coconut may be sprinkled lightly with sugar (approximately 1 Tbsp. per 4 cups coconut), and packed into moisture-vapor proof sealed packages and frozen at 0°F. Glass canning jars are also good for this use. Be sure to label and date.
- For every 2 cups grated coconut, add 2 Tbsp. sugar. Mix well, and pack into freezer containers or freezer bags.
- Coconut may be held 8 to 12 months.

COCONUT: TROPIC DELIGHT

Tropicals may vary in natural pectin, acid and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate. For further information refer to Extension publications on canning, freezing and drying.

Ambrosia

Oranges
Fresh grated coconut
Sugar

Arrange generous layers of orange pulp and grated coconut with a light sprinkling of sugar in between. Moisten with coconut milk. Chill for several hours before serving.

While the simplest Ambrosia is generally the most favored, diced pineapple, sliced bananas, seeded grapes or other fruits can be added.

Coconut Milk

Drain a coconut, reserve the liquid, and prepare as directed under "Basic Preparation." Measure the reserved liquid and add enough water to make 1 cup. Allow 1 cup liquid for each cup of grated coconut. Place equal portions of grated coconut and liquid in a saucepan; heat the mixture to a boil (212°F.), then remove from heat and cool. Strain through a fine-meshed sieve or through 2 thicknesses of cheesecloth. About ½ pound of coconut yields 3 cups grated coconut which will produce 3 cups coconut milk.

Toasted Coconut

Slice or grate coconut meat very thin; spread in shallow pan. Place in a 200°F. oven for 2 hours, stirring occasionally (do not let coconut become too brown). If coconut is not dry, reduce temperature for additional baking. Remove from oven, cool and store in airtight containers.

Crusty Coconut-Almond Fish

6 (3 oz.) fish fillets
2 egg whites or ¼ cup egg substitute
1 Tbsp. water
1 cup shredded unsweetened coconut
¾ cup toasted chopped almonds
2 Tbsp. olive or other vegetable oil

Sauce:

½ cup plain low fat yogurt
2 Tbsp. lemon or lime juice
1 Tbsp. chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 425°F. Place fish fillets on waxed paper. In a shallow bowl, stir together egg and water. In a second bowl, stir together coconut and almonds. Brush fish lightly with oil, dip in egg, then roll in coconut-almond mixture until well coated. Place on baking pan and bake 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Mix together the 3 sauce ingredients and drizzle over the cooked fish. Makes 6 servings.

Approximate nutrient value per serving: 297 calories, 25 grams protein, 19 grams fat, 8 grams carbohydrates, 51 milligrams cholesterol, 1 gram fiber. (This recipe can also be made using boneless, skinless chicken breasts instead of fish.)

*Adapted and reprinted from: *International Produce Cookbook and Guide*, by Marlene Brown, © 1989, with permission from Price Stern Sloan, Inc., Los Angeles.