

# Cooking with Coconut



***Image: Coconut Palms on the Simeulue Island, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia***

Coconut products have experienced a boom in popularity over the past few years due to their great cooking versatility and their much revered health benefits. The coconut palm is under such demand that it is now grown in more than 90 countries with Indonesia, the Philippines and India together growing more than 45 million tonnes of coconuts per year.

In Hindu the coconut palm is referred to as '*the tree which gives all that is necessary for living*'; from sugar and oil to flour and milk, the coconut palm certainly has it all.

Perhaps one of the most researched and talked about products of the coconut palm is the oil. Coconut oil is very stable and perfect for cooking in high heat as it has a high smoking point if the oil is of a high quality eg cold pressed and extra virgin. For your health, studies have shown that consuming 2 tablespoons of raw coconut oil each day increases metabolism, improves immune system function and can reduce sugar cravings. It is also a very smooth oil with a mild aroma that makes it great for use on your body as a gentle moisturiser for all skin types.

Coconut water is the fresh liquid found inside the young coconut when you crack it open. This delicious natural health drink contains the 5 essential electrolytes in their natural form to keep your body healthy and hydrated and they are magnesium, calcium, phosphorus, potassium and a little salt. Coconut water is a great drink any time of the year and with its natural sweetness it can add a new level of healthiness to your favourite smoothies or simply blend with pineapple and mango for a refreshing spring drink.

Coconut milk and cream are made simply using the flesh of the coconut, which is blended thoroughly. These two creamy liquids are abundant in cell-protecting anti-oxidants, they contain many vitamins including C, E and some B's as well as minerals such as magnesium, potassium, phosphorus and iron. Lactose free, coconut milk and cream can be used as the ideal dairy alternative in sweet and savoury dishes such as soups, curries and desserts and even in your cup of tea. Try pouring the cream over pancakes or adding to your breakfast cereal for a natural nutrient boost and to add a mildly sweet flavour. Although healthy, coconut milk and cream are better for you in moderation as they are very high in calories.

Another highly useful product of the coconut is coconut flour, which is made from pure ground coconut flesh. It is super high in healthy fats, is a great source of dietary fiber and rich in protein. Coconut flour makes excellent gluten free cakes and delicious flatbreads and can be added to smoothies or sprinkled over your breakfast cereal for extra flavour.

Enjoy your week in the kitchen!

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