

# Florida Food Fare

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## Coconut

**Description:** The coconut is the seed and edible fruit of the coco palm tree (*Cocos nucifera*). A single tree yields thousands of coconuts over its approximately 70-year life span. Each coconut has several layers: a smooth, deep tan outer covering; a brown fiber of 1-2" thickness; a hard, dark brown hairy husk with three indented "eyes" at one end; a thin brown skin; the cream white coconut meat; and at the center, a thin opaque coconut juice. The mature coconut is oval shaped and about 12 inches long.

**Availability:** Thought to be native to the Indo-Pacific area of the tropics, coconuts are grown throughout the tropical world, including south Florida. Most of the coconuts sold in the U.S. come from Central America and Puerto Rico. Fresh coconuts are available year round, with peak supplies from September to January.

**Nutritional Value:** This varies with coconuts according to its stage of development. The mature coconut is a good source of iron. Approximately 86% of the calories in coconuts are from fat, most of which is saturated fat. One cup shredded raw unsweetened coconut contains: 47% water, 283 calories, 3 gm protein, 26 gm total fat, 24 gm saturated fat, 12 gm carbohydrates, 2.6 mg vitamin C, 1.9 mg iron, 3 gm fiber, and no cholesterol.

**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. Unless you find or are given one in a husk (or enjoy strain and struggle) select a coconut that has already been husked.

**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 freshly grated coconut will keep for 3-4 days refrigerated. Soft coconut meat and milk should be refrigerated and used within a day.

**Freezing Coconut:** The fresh meat will keep best if kept in chunks and sprinkled lightly with sugar (1 Tb to 4 C coconut), then packed into moisture vapor proof sealed packages and frozen at 0 degrees F. It may be frozen for 8-12 months.

**Use & Preparation:** To remove coconut meat from the shell, pierce at least two of the “eyes” with an ice pick. Drain coconut through a fine-meshed sieve to reserve liquid. Removing the meat can be done in several ways. Usually the easiest is to tap the “nut” with a hammer to loosen meat, then tap hard enough to crack the nut open. Remove meat in pieces, using a regular table knife. Trim off brown layer with a sharp knife or vegetable peeler. Rinse, then grate, chop or puree and use as desired. With greener coconuts it may be helpful to place the whole coconut in a 350 degrees F. oven for 15-20 minutes, then proceed with the above steps to remove the liquid and coconut meat. Yield: 1/2 lb coconut yields approximately 3 C grated.

## **Recipes:**

### ***Coconut Macaroons***

*Great for Holiday Cookies!*

5 1/2 cups grated coconut    1 (14 oz) can fat free sweetened condensed milk  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract    1 1/2 teaspoons almond extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In large mixing bowl, combine coconut, sweetened condensed milk and extracts; mix well. Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls onto aluminum foil-lined and generously greased baking sheets. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until lightly browned around the edges. Immediately remove from baking sheets. Store loosely covered at room temperature. Makes 4 dozen.

## **Haupia**

*A Traditional Hawaiian Luau Dessert!*

3 coconuts, meat removed & grated\*  
4 tablespoons sugar

4 tablespoons cornstarch  
1/4 cup water  
Pinch of salt

Measure grated coconut. Place in blender or food processor to puree. Add equal amount of water and churn to a fine puree. Pour into saucepan and let stand in a warm place for 1-2 hours. Add sugar and salt to mixture. Cook over medium heat until warm, stirring occasionally. Add enough water (1/4 cup) to cornstarch to dissolve it into a paste. Add cornstarch to coconut mixture, cook until thick, stirring constantly. Mixture should become somewhat translucent and leave the sides of the pan. Pour into an 8x8" pan. Chill until firm. Cut into 2" squares. Makes 16 servings.

*\*Frozen coconut milk can be substituted for coconut. Use 1 1/2 cups frozen coconut milk, thawed and 1/12 cups water. Blend together and omit puree process.*

## **Hawaiian Curry**

2 cups grated fresh coconut  
3 cups low-fat milk  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger  
2 medium onions, chopped  
2 apples, cored and sliced  
2 tablespoons curry powder

1/2 cup butter  
1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
1/2 cup fat free half & half or  
low-fat evaporated milk  
Black or white pepper and salt to taste  
3 cups chicken, pork, shrimp or scallops  
1 cup fresh pineapple, finely diced

Combine coconut and milk in saucepan and heat to simmering. Add garlic, ginger, onions and apples. Blend together curry powder and 2 tablespoons of butter or margarine. Add to coconut mixture and cook slowly at low heat for 3 hours, stirring occasionally. Refrigerate for one hour. Strain; blend flour with remaining butter and add to the strained mixture. Cook, stirring constantly until thickened. Add pepper, salt and half & half. Add cubed meat or seafood and continue to cook over low heat for 20 minutes. Add pineapple and cook for 10-15 minutes more or until meat is done. Serve with rice and any of the following accompaniments: crisp chopped bacon, chutney, chopped pickles, grated coconut, sliced lemon, chopped nuts and sliced hard-cooked eggs.

## Coconut Flan

1/3 cup sugar

1 cup boiling water

1 cup grated fresh coconut

6 egg yolks, slightly beaten

1 can fat free sweetened condensed milk

Heat 8x8" baking dish in pan of hot water. Melt sugar in dry frying pan\*, stirring constantly until light amber; pour into baking dish and cover entire inner surface with melted sugar. Place coconut in baking dish. In a saucepan, add milk to boiling water, simmer 3 minutes. Cool. Add egg yolks and stir. Pour over caramelized sugar and coconut, put in pan of hot water and bake in 350 degrees F. oven for about 30-35 minutes. Cool quickly.

*\*Note: Do not use a Teflon or similar coated pan for melting the sugar. The temperature of the melted sugar may get hot enough to damage the surface. (Voice of experience) An iron skillet is probably best.*