




The **TASTE** *of the* **TROPICS**



In the midst of winter, the taste of coconut can transport you to a warmer, sunnier place. Here's how to enjoy it in all its forms.

by **LISA GOSSELIN** *recipes by* **KATIE WEBSTER**
recipe photography by **CARIN KRASNER**

*"One of
these nuts
is a meal
for a man,
both meat
and drink"*

~ MARCO POLO ~



I was a 5-year-old,

smothered in sunscreen, playing in the shade of a Caribbean palm, when I saw my first coconut. Or heard it, actually: a *plunk!* and a giant greenish-brown globe, the size of a soccer ball, rolled within feet of my towel. Like everything on this vacation—the powdery sand, the toy-blue sea, the blinkingly bright tropical sun—it was something new, to be explored. I rolled it down the beach to my mother. "You found a coconut!" she cried with delight.

Until then, I only knew coconut as the sweet snowy flakes that frosted cupcakes, the chewy filling of Mounds bars, the sun-washed scent of Coppertone. Later, I came to love its lush flavor in rummy piña coladas, its cooling magic in Indian curries, its sticky sweetness in Balinese rice puddings. It was an extravagant taste, a creamy treat that always conjured the rustle of palm fronds and lapping waves.

That day we brought the giant orb up from the beach to our bungalow where my dad asked a boy with a



machete to crack the shell open. There was the hairy "nut" I recognized from pictures in *The Jungle Book*. He snapped it in two, forming cups. We drank the sweet water inside and, with a knife, the boy carved out oily little white chunks, "meat" he called them, that tasted nothing like what I had expected. I chewed the oily flesh, then held my hand out for more. "It's as rich as candy," my mother cautioned. "You only need a little bit."

Today, I still want more. But despite all the claims about coconut as a health food, I am careful with it because it is high in calories and saturated fat. So I'm learning to use the various parts of this fruit (and yes, it's a fruit, not a nut) judiciously. In these amazing recipes by Katie Webster, a can of "lite" coconut milk folds into a heady Chicken Coconut Curry. Cold coconut water gives a splash of freshness to a mango smoothie and coconut flakes coat a delicate chocolate truffle.

And occasionally, I'll still find the whole coconut at a market, bring it home, roll it around and dream of palms, sun and sand.



Baked Coconut Shrimp with Tangelo Salsa

hif

Makes: 6 appetizer servings, 4 shrimp & $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salsa each
Active time: 45 minutes **Total:** 45 minutes

A sweet-and-sour citrus salsa complements the toasty coconut crust on these sassy little shrimp. Serve them as a plated first course with the tangelo salsa or as a passed hors d'oeuvre. Be sure to use unsweetened shredded coconut or the dish will be too sweet—look for it near other baking supplies or in bulk at natural-foods stores or well-stocked supermarkets.

2 cups chopped peeled tangelos, such as Minneola, or tangerines	2 large eggs
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped red bell pepper	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro	1½ teaspoons paprika
1 scallion, chopped	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder
2 teaspoons minced fresh jalapeño pepper, or more to taste	1½ cups unsweetened shredded coconut
1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided	1 pound raw shrimp (21-25 per pound; see Tip, page 94)

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Coat a large baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. Combine tangelos (or tangerines), bell pepper, cilantro, scallion, jalapeño and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in a food processor or blender. Pulse to form a chunky salsa. Set aside.
3. Beat eggs in a small dish. Whisk flour, paprika and garlic powder in another small dish. Combine coconut and the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in a third dish.
4. Peel shrimp, leaving the tails on. Butterfly the shrimp by cutting halfway through the back, stopping at the tail, so they will stand tail up. Dredge the shrimp in the flour mixture. Dip in the egg and then coat with coconut, leaving the tail uncoated. Stand the shrimp tail-up on the prepared baking sheet. Discard any unused dipping mixtures.
5. Bake the shrimp until cooked through and the coating is starting to brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Serve the shrimp with the salsa.

Per serving: 203 calories; 10 g fat (7 g sat, 1 g mono); 157 mg cholesterol; 15 g carbohydrate; 0 g added sugars; 14 g protein; 4 g fiber; 329 mg sodium; 324 mg potassium. **Nutrition bonus:** Vitamin C (64% daily value), Vitamin A (27% dv).

COCONUT FLAKES

Once the outer green husk of the coconut is removed, what remains is the seed and its rich inner white lining, the meat. While fresh coconut is nutritionally superior (it contains more water, which dilutes the fat and calories), prepackaged flaked or shredded coconut is the easiest way to go. Choose unsweetened over sweetened, which has 2 teaspoons added sugar per ounce. —Karen Ansel, M.S., R.D.





COCONUT WATER

Coconut water has gotten a lot of buzz as a sports drink, in part because 1 cup serves up more than 10 percent of your daily dose of potassium—an electrolyte you lose through sweat.

That makes it a great hydrator for light workouts (just be mindful that 8 ounces delivers 45 calories).

But it won't do the job if you're sweating up a storm. Why? When we sweat we lose up to 10 times more sodium than potassium. And coconut water only contains about 30 mg of sodium per cup, whereas sports drinks usually deliver about 110 mg. —K.A.



TIP: To toast coconut for these truffles, place in a small dry skillet and cook, stirring often, until golden, about 5 minutes, or spread in a shallow baking dish and bake at 350°F until light golden and fragrant, 5 to 10 minutes.

Coconut-Dark Chocolate Truffles

Makes: about 40 truffles

Active time: 1 hour **Total:** 4-5 hours (including chilling time)

To make ahead: Store airtight in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Coconut macaroons meet chocolate truffles in these little treats. Inside the snap of the dark chocolate shell lies the tender coconut-cocoa filling: a mix of naturally sweet dates, cocoa and coconut flour. Look for coconut flour near other gluten-free flours.

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| 2 cups whole dates, pitted and coarsely chopped (16-18 large) | 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder |
| 1 cup boiling water | 10 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped (about 1½ cups) |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | 1½ cups unsweetened shredded coconut, toasted (see Tip, above) |
| ¼ teaspoon salt | |
| ¾ cup coconut flour | |

1. Place dates in a small bowl. Pour boiling water over them and let stand until cool, about 40 minutes. Transfer the dates and liquid to a food processor. Add vanilla and salt and puree until smooth, scraping down the sides once or twice. Add coconut flour and cocoa and process, scraping the sides occasionally, until a thick doughlike paste forms. Refrigerate until very cold, 2 to 3 hours.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil. Using 2 teaspoons per truffle, roll the mixture into about 40 balls.
3. Place half the chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave in 30-second bursts, stirring in between, until it is about half melted. Remove from the microwave and continue stirring until completely melted. Place coconut in a shallow dish.
4. Add about 4 date balls at a time to the melted chocolate. Working quickly, use 2 forks to roll each ball in the chocolate until coated. Use a fork to transfer the truffles one at a time to the coconut, letting excess chocolate drip off first. Sprinkle with coconut to coat. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet.
5. When the first batch of chocolate is gone and about half the date balls are coated, melt the remaining chocolate and coat the remaining balls with chocolate and coconut. Transfer the baking sheet to the refrigerator and chill until the chocolate is set, about 1 hour.

Per truffle: 82 calories; 4 g fat (3 g sat, 0 g mono); 0 mg cholesterol; 12 g carbohydrate; 3 g added sugars; 1 g protein; 3 g fiber; 21 mg sodium; 69 mg potassium.

COCONUT FLOUR

Coconut flour is a healthy way to add decadent flavor to baked goods. It packs a whopping 5 grams of fiber per 2 tablespoons (with only 2 grams of total and saturated fat). It's good for diabetics, too: adding coconut flour to baked goods lowers the glycemic index (a measure of the rate that a food increases blood sugar). —K.A.

Creamsicle Breakfast Smoothie

h*xw h*f h*h

Makes: 2 servings, 1¾ cups each

Active time: 5 minutes **Total:** 5 minutes

Though it tastes like those iconic vanilla-and-orange popsicles, this smoothie is balanced with carbohydrates, protein and, thanks to the addition of coconut water, essential electrolytes. Look for pure coconut water without added sugar in the refrigerated section near other flavored waters or near shelf-stable waters and natural fruit juices.

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| 1 cup cold pure coconut water, without added sugar or flavor | 1 cup frozen or fresh mango chunks |
| 1 cup nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt | 3 tablespoons frozen orange juice concentrate |
| | 2 cups ice |

Blend coconut water, yogurt, mango, orange juice concentrate and ice in a blender until smooth.

Per serving: 189 calories; 1 g fat (0 g sat, 0 g mono); 0 mg cholesterol; 34 g carbohydrate; 5 g added sugars; 13 g protein; 3 g fiber; 173 mg sodium; 604 mg potassium. **Nutrition bonus:** Vitamin C (110% daily value), Folate (20% dv), Calcium, Potassium & Vitamin A (18% dv).



- TIP -

Coconut meat and coconut oil are solid at temperatures below 76°F. To melt solidified coconut meat or oil, remove the lid and place the container in a bowl of very hot water; stir frequently until melted.



Banana-Coconut Dairy-Free Ice Cream

h+f

Makes: 12 servings, about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup each

Active time: 15 minutes **Total:** 15 minutes (plus 12+ hours banana-freezing time)

To make ahead: Store airtight in the freezer for up to 1 week.

Blended with frozen ripe bananas, coconut meat (a.k.a. coconut manna or butter) is transformed into the base for creamy dairy-free ice cream. Coconut butter is made from finely ground whole coconut meat and has the texture of natural peanut butter. It can be found in jars near other nut butters, baking oils and sometimes even in the supplement department of natural-foods stores and well-stocked supermarkets.

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| 8 very ripe bananas | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup agave syrup or honey |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted coconut meat (see Tip, above), such as coconut butter or coconut manna | Pinch of salt |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup "lite" coconut milk | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup unsweetened shredded coconut, toasted (see Tip, page 67), plus more for garnish |

1. Peel bananas and cut into quarters. Freeze in an airtight container until completely frozen, at least overnight.
2. Place frozen banana pieces, coconut meat, coconut milk, agave (or honey) and salt in a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Pulse and process until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed. Add shredded coconut and pulse once or twice just to combine. Serve immediately as soft ice cream, garnished with coconut (if desired). Or transfer to an airtight container and freeze until firm. Let stand at room temperature for 5 minutes before scooping.

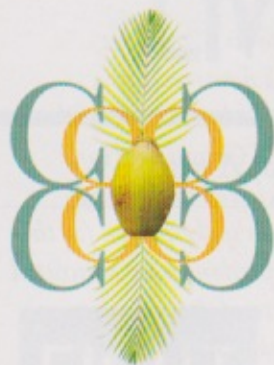
Per serving: 171 calories; 8 g fat (7 g sat, 0 g mono); 0 mg cholesterol; 26 g carbohydrate; 5 g added sugars; 2 g protein; 4 g fiber; 19 mg sodium; 291 mg potassium.

COCONUT MEAT

If you're low-carbing it, you'll be happy to know each 2-by-2-inch piece of raw coconut contains only about 7 grams of carbohydrate (less than a third of what you'd get from a medium apple) and is jammed with 4 grams of fiber (16 percent of your daily dose). On the flip side, coconut is the nutritional opposite of what you'd expect from a fruit: what it lacks in carbs, it makes up for in fat with 15 grams per 2-inch chunk, most of which is the unhealthy saturated kind. Another reason to not eat it with abandon: that little piece sports 160 calories. —K.A.



INSET: APTISAMU / SHUTTERSTOCK



COCONUT MILK

Coconut milk is made from a brew of coconut meat and water. But don't confuse it with lower-cal coconut water. Rich and thick and more like cream than milk, coconut milk packs an eye-opening 445 calories and 48 grams of fat (43 grams saturated) per cup. That's where "lite" coconut milk comes in: subbing it for traditional coconut milk, as we do in this recipe, can trim roughly two-thirds the fat and calories without sacrificing flavor. —K.A.

Chicken Coconut Curry

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Makes: 6 servings, about 1½ cups each

Active time: 50 minutes **Total:** 1 hour

Cost per serving: under \$3.50

At once comforting and exotic-tasting, this rich curry stew will warm you on chilly winter evenings. Chunks of potato, lean chicken and loads of veggies make it a meal in a bowl. Enjoy with a fruity white wine like Gewürztraminer or Chenin Blanc to tame the heat.

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| 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into bite-size cubes | 1 14-ounce can reduced-sodium chicken broth |
| 6 teaspoons curry powder, divided | 4 cups 1-inch chunks Yukon Gold potatoes (about 3 medium) |
| ¾ teaspoon salt, divided | 1 cup sliced carrots |
| 2 tablespoons coconut oil or canola oil, divided | ½ cup chopped celery |
| 1 large yellow onion, chopped | ¾ cup frozen peas |
| 1 tablespoon chopped garlic | ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro |
| 1 14-ounce can "lite" coconut milk | 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar |

1. Place chicken in a medium bowl. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon curry powder and ¾ teaspoon salt; toss to coat. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add chicken and cook, stirring once or twice, until mostly browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
2. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in the pot and add onion and garlic. Cook, stirring often, until the onion is starting to soften, 2 to 4 minutes. Stir in the remaining 5 teaspoons curry powder and cook, stirring, until fragrant but not browned, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add coconut milk, broth, potatoes, carrots, celery and the remaining ¾ teaspoon salt and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring often. Reduce heat to medium-low to maintain a gentle simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes and carrots are tender, 10 to 12 minutes.
3. Return the chicken to the pot and add peas. Increase heat to high and continue cooking until the chicken is cooked through, 4 to 5 minutes more. Remove from the heat and stir in cilantro and brown sugar.

Per serving: 346 calories; 12 g fat (8 g sat, 1 g mono); 63 mg cholesterol; 31 g carbohydrate; 2 g added sugars; 29 g protein; 5 g fiber; 574 mg sodium; 934 mg potassium. **Nutrition bonus:** Vitamin A (77% daily value), Vitamin C (29% dv), Potassium (27% dv), Iron & Magnesium (16% dv).