



Crazy for Coconut

Cook up some culinary delights with this versatile fruit.

By Danielle Douglass | Photography by Rae Huo | Food Styling by Karen Jones


Everywhere I go these days, in supermarkets, health food stores, big box retailers, and my favorite restaurants, I see coconut products in more forms than I ever imagined.

Coconut is a fruit. Botanically, it's a type of fruit known as a "drupe." The seed of a drupe is enclosed in a hard covering – peaches and olives are drupes, too.

People are buying and using coconut products more than ever, as oil, flour, sugar, cream, flakes, milk, water, butter, vinegar, nectar, and even amino acids.

Coconut oil is one of the most common coconut products, and has many uses in and out of the kitchen.

While coconut has vitamins C and B and minerals such as potassium, calcium and magnesium, it also has a high level of saturated fat. For me, a varied diet of healthy fats, lean proteins, fresh fruits and vegetables, and healthy grains, works best.

Aside from sticking a straw into a young, green coconut when I'm craving something with the delicious taste of the island fruit, I enjoy cooking with coconut. If you're looking for ways to use that multi-pound bag of coconut flour or jug of coconut oil you just purchased, here are a few recipes to help you out. 





Coconut Macadamia Nut Crusted Mahi Mahi

- 4 mahi mahi fillets (about 1½ lbs.)
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ¼ cup finely shredded unsweetened coconut
- ¼ cup panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)
- ¼ cup finely chopped macadamia nuts
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup coconut flour
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ¼ tsp. paprika
- Cooking spray
- Diced mango, chopped cilantro, and shredded coconut for toppings

Marinate mahi mahi in coconut milk in the refrigerator at least 30 minutes. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a shallow dish, mix shredded coconut, panko, and nuts. Prepare two additional dishes for dredging, one with beaten eggs, the other with coconut flour and seasonings. Dip fish in flour, then eggs, then coconut-panko mixture. Place in shallow baking dish prepared with cooking spray and bake 20 minutes or until done. Top with mango, cilantro, and coconut, if desired. Makes 4 servings.

Per serving (without toppings): Calories 400, protein 39 g, carbohydrates 16 g, total fat 21 g, saturated fat 12 g, cholesterol 220 mg, sodium 360 mg, fiber 7 g, total sugar 2 g

Vermicelli Noodle Salad with Coconut Peanut Dressing

- 8 oz. rice vermicelli noodles
- 14-oz. can coconut milk
- ¼ cup peanut butter
- 1 Tbsp. curry powder
- 1 garlic clove
- Juice of one lime
- 1 tsp. hot chili sauce
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup shredded carrot
- 2 cups bean sprouts
- ½ cup julienned string beans
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- Chopped peanuts and cilantro for toppings

Cook noodles according to directions on package. While the noodles are cooking, make the dressing. Place coconut milk through salt in a blender and process until smooth. Drain noodles and place in a large bowl. Mix in vegetables. Add dressing and toss gently. Serve hot or refrigerate at least 1 hour. Top with peanuts and cilantro. Makes 4 servings.

Per serving (without toppings): Calories 360, protein 8 g, carbohydrates 32 g, total fat 22g, saturated fat 14 g, sodium 350 mg, fiber 4g, total sugar 9g



Dark Chocolate Coconut Squares

¼ cup coconut oil, plus a little more to grease the pan
⅓ cup honey, maple syrup, or agave nectar
2 tsp. vanilla
2 eggs, slightly beaten
¼ cup unsweetened almond milk
½ cup coconut flour
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. salt
8 oz. dark chocolate (60% cacao), chopped
½ cup coarsely chopped macadamia nuts or pecans
½ cup finely shredded unsweetened coconut

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease an 8-inch square nonstick baking pan with some coconut oil. In a large bowl, mix ¼ cup coconut oil, honey, vanilla, eggs, and almond milk. In a medium bowl, mix coconut flour, baking soda, and salt. Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients and mix well. Fold in chocolate, nuts, and shredded coconut. If desired, top with extra chocolate. Bake 20 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before cutting into squares. Makes 12 servings.

Per serving: Calories 260, protein 3 g, carbohydrates 22 g, total fat 18 g, saturated fat 10 g, cholesterol 30 mg, sodium 90 mg, fiber 4 g, total sugar 15 g