

What a lovely b

COCONUTS!

Grown on leafy palms, basking in the golden tropical sun - coconuts are a true exotic extravagance for all you fruity mamas and papas!



Spiced red lentil and coconut soup

30ml sunflower oil
2 red onions, finely chopped
1 small chilli, seeded and finely sliced
2 garlic cloves, chopped
2.5cm fresh lemon grass, outer layers removed and inside finely sliced
200g red lentils, rinsed

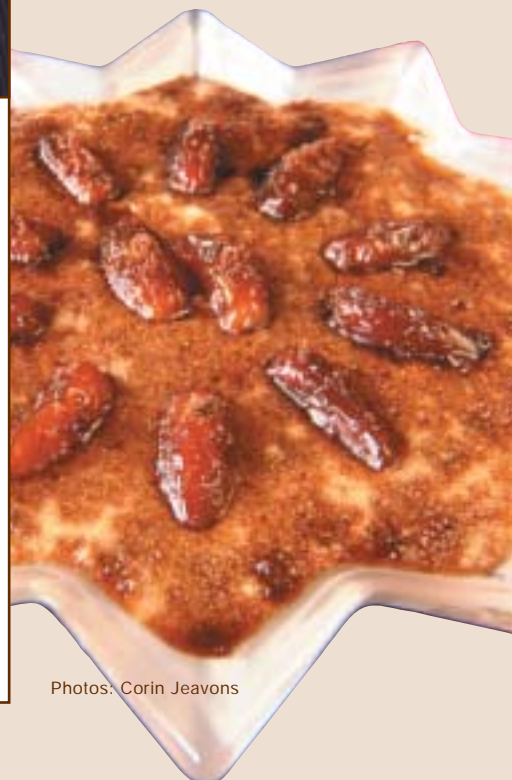
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp paprika
400ml coconut milk
juice of 1 lime
3 spring onions, chopped
20g fresh coriander, finely chopped
salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 1 Heat the oil in a deep frying pan, add the onions, chilli, garlic and lemon grass. Cook for 5 minutes or until onions have softened.
- 2 Add lentils and spices, coconut milk and 900ml of water and stir. Bring to boil, stir, reduce heat and simmer 40-45 minutes, until lentils are mushy.
- 3 Add lime juice, spring onions and fresh coriander, reserving some for garnish. Season and serve with garnish.

From *The Vegan Cookbook* by Nicola Graimes

Rich in calcium, carbohydrate and some B vitamins, coconuts are a good source of folic acid, vitamin C, calcium, zinc, iron, magnesium, potassium, protein, carbohydrates and fibre - and they're low in sodium. Phew - wonderfood! They do contain some saturated fat but it's not stored by the body in the same way as animal fats and doesn't cause high cholesterol or increased risk of heart disease. Their fatty acids - lauric and capric acids - protect against bacteria and viruses and lauric acid even helps against alcohol damage to the liver. Other benefits include anti-inflammatory powers and possible control of rheumatoid arthritis. Coconut oil actually increases good cholesterol and raises the rate at which the body burns off energy.

However, you don't need a one way ticket to the Bahamas to reap the benefits (damn!) as most supermarkets have coconut desiccated, shredded, as milk, cream and oil and even whole coconuts fresh from the beach in the fruit and veg section. So, try these recipes for a taste of paradise?!



Photos: Corin Jeavons

LUNCH OF...



Coconut rice with battered vegetables

250g rice
475ml coconut milk
125g mushrooms
125g courgettes, in 5mm slices
125g aubergine, in 5mm slices
Oil for deep-frying

175ml water
1 tsp green curry paste (check the ingredients list as some green curry pastes contain fish. If you can't find a veggie one use normal curry paste)

Batter:
75g rice or plain flour

To serve:
Bottled sweet chilli sauce

- 1 Put the uncooked rice in a pan with the coconut milk and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 12-15 minutes or until the rice is tender. The rice may have soaked up all of the milk but if it needs to be drained, strain it over a pan so that you reserve the liquid. Add some water to the coconut milk and place the coconut rice in a metal colander above the pan. Take a chopstick and push it through the rice to the colander, to leave a steamhole. Do this in several places. Put on a saucepan lid and steam it for about 15 minutes. Remove the lid, fluff up the rice and steam for 4 minutes more.
- 2 While the rice is cooking, make a light batter by mixing the flour, water and curry paste.
- 3 Heat the oil in a wok, coat vegetables in batter and deep-fry in batches over a moderate heat until golden. Remove with a slotted spoon, drain on kitchen paper.
- 4 Serve the rice on a dish surrounded by deep-fried vegetables. Serve chilli sauce separately.

From *Vegetarian Thai* by Jackum Brown

Rum, coconut and date cream

225g fresh dates, stoned
250ml coconut cream

110ml dark rum
30ml muscovado sugar

- 1 Reserve 6 dates - blend the rest into a puree with rum and coconut cream.
- 2 Pour into a glass dish and decorate with reserved dates. Sprinkle sugar over - refrigerate for half a day.

From *Green Gastronomy* by Colin Spencer



Vietnamese pumpkin* and coconut curry

Garlic paste:
4 garlic cloves, chopped
1 red chilli, chopped
2.5cm fresh ginger, peeled and chopped

1 tbsp sunflower oil
1 onion, sliced
1 tsp turmeric
8 cardamom pods, crushed (remove husk)
small piece of cinnamon bark

400 ml coconut milk
150 ml water
250g pumpkin, peeled and cut into cubes*
125g sweet potato, peeled and cut into cubes
125g courgette, cut into cubes
1 tbsp lime juice
handful of fresh coriander
salt and pepper

To serve:
Thai fragrant rice

* You can use butternut squash.

- 1 Make garlic paste: whizz garlic, chilli and ginger in blender or food processor.
- 2 Heat the sunflower oil in a saucepan, add onion and fry until golden. Add garlic paste and fry until fragrant. Add spices and fry for 1 minute.
- 3 Add coconut milk and water, stir well and bring to boil. Simmer for 5 minutes.
- 4 Add pumpkin and sweet potato, simmer for 15 minutes, courgettes and simmer until tender.
- 5 Add lime juice, fresh coriander and season - serve.

From *The Green World Cookbook* by Rachel Demuth