

Coconut-lime pulled chicken tacos 'delicious'

Coconut milk adds an exotically creamy richness to foods

By Jim Hirsch

Who knew coconut milk could be so confusing?

It shouldn't be. At heart, it's a delicious liquid made from coconuts (duh!) that can effortlessly add an exotically creamy richness to so many foods. Except that grocers sell about half a dozen different products that go by the same or very similar names. And they aren't interchangeable.

So let's start with what coconut milk isn't.

Coconut water is a hip new drink that is made from the liquid inside coconuts. Drink it, but don't cook with it.

Coconut milk beverage is a sweetened drink made from coconut milk and sugar. It's usually sold in boxes alongside soy milk.

Coconut cream is a very thick, fatty liquid made from steeping shredded coconut in hot water at a

4:1 ratio. It is sold in cans, usually in the international aisle.

Sweetened cream of coconut is coconut cream that has been (are you ready?) sweetened. It's intended for cocktails. Pina colada anyone?

Coconut milk is the real deal and the one you want for cooking. Coconut milk is made like coconut cream, but with a 1:1 ratio of coconut to water. The result is a thick, pourable product sold in cans in the international aisle.

In Southeast Asia, Africa and even South America, coconut milk is used in curries, soups (like Thai chicken and coconut), sauces, even sweets, such as rice puddings and some baked goods. In the US, we see it most often in curries, cream pies and puddings.

While it isn't hard to make your own (simmer shredded coconut in water, then drain), let's face it, none of us is going to do that.



In this undated image shows a plate of coconut-lime pulled chicken tacos in Concord, NH. (AP)

Canned coconut milk is widely available and inexpensive. But you will need to stir or shake it. The fatty "cream" will rise to the top of the can over time, creating a dense layer that needs to be mixed back into the watery liquid below.

For more ideas for using coconut milk, check out the Off the Beaten Aisle column over on Food Network: <http://bit.ly/JgD8aq>

Coconut-Lime Pulled Chicken Tacos

Start to finish: 25 minutes

Servings: 4

2-pound rotisserie chicken

1 cup coconut milk

1/2 teaspoon cumin

Zest and juice of 1 lime

Splash hot sauce

Salt and ground black pepper

1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

Eight 6-inch flour tortillas, warmed

1 small red onion, diced
1 avocado, peeled, pitted and sliced

Remove the meat from the chicken, then use your fingers to pull any larger chunks into bite-size pieces.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine the chicken, coconut milk, cumin, lime zest and juice, and hot sauce. Simmer until heated through and thick. Season the chicken with salt and pepper, then remove from the heat. Stir in the cilantro, then divide the mixture between the tortillas.

Top each serving with diced onion and avocado. Serve immediately.

Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 610 calories; 290 calories from fat (48 percent of total calories); 33 g fat (15 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 100 mg cholesterol; 39 g carbohydrate; 40 g protein; 6 g fiber; 970 mg sodium. (AP)

Gardening

'Attractive choice'

Wildflowers draw wildlife

By Dean Fosdick

Wildflowers are an attractive choice for home gardeners who hope to attract wildlife with plants that are also low-maintenance, and drought- and disease-resistant. Some wildflower varieties require more patience than others, however, requiring several seasons before they bloom.

"There are a couple of reasons why people get into wildflowers," said Russ Nicholson, senior agronomist for Pennington Seed Inc. in Madison, Ga. "One is that they're trying to reduce the size of the area being managed and know wildflowers are easy to grow. Or, two, they might be interested in birds and butterflies, and enjoy having feeders or houses in their gardens to connect with the wildflowers."

One person's wildflower, of course, may be another person's weed.

"Natives" are defined as plants that grew in North America before the Europeans arrived. "Weeds" are any plants growing where they're not wanted. And then there are "naturalized aliens," plants that have taken hold in certain areas but that should be avoided because they crowd out and contaminate native gene pools. That would include St. Anne's lace, chicory and ox-eyed daisies. Each appears on many state and federal noxious weed lists.

Habitats

Shop around for wildflowers rather than seeking them out in the woods. The odds are against the latter surviving because they often require habitats different than those in your yard.

"It's illegal to pull them out of the ground on most public lands," said Mike Lizotte, managing partner for American Meadows, a gardening company in Williston, Vt. "That can draw a stiff fine."

Jerry Goodspeed, a Utah State University extension horticulturist, puts it another way: "Enjoy nature where nature is and go to a nursery if you want to grow wildflowers. More plant varieties are becoming available to homeowners each year."

Wildflower varieties are divided into meadow, woodland and wetland. All require some knowledge about where they grow best.

"Meadow varieties are the easiest to cultivate from seed," Lizotte said. "Some wildflowers need an exacting microclimate, especially the woodland types. It can take a white trillium from five to seven years to yield a flower from seed."

Blends

Many people new to wildflower gardening buy specialty seed blends that give good value for the money, Lizotte said. Wildflower seed mixtures generally include from a dozen to 30 varieties of annuals and perennials.

"Three or four years down the road, people start dialing in on the different species they really liked from the blends," Lizotte said.

Choose bare root plants, plugs or seedlings if you want your wildflower gardening to be fast and easy. Go with seeds if you have large areas to cover.

And mimic Mother Nature by planting in late fall or well into winter. "That will give them a chance to germinate earlier in the spring, before any leaves come out," Nicholson said. "It's getting pretty late to put something out there around Mother's Day that should be in the ground by February."

Always buy from a reputable source, Lizotte said. "Don't get fooled by packaging or price. Somewhere on the packaging, it will tell you what's in it. Ideally, you want 100 percent pure seed free of any fill." (AP)

Food



Red rice with beet.

'Oven Experiments' with guiltless summer treats

Budour's passion for food began at young age

By Chaitali B. Roy
Special to the Arab Times

Theovenexperiments.com is not just about food, cooking and recipes. It is about thoughts, stories and perceptions related to the kitchen. Recipes are an important ingredient in the experiments, but not always. There are stories associated with cooking, asides on specific recipes, interesting videos, amazing photographs, suggestions on innovative kitchenware and cookware, feeding and a whole lot of other food related experiences. Theovenexperiments.com is the brain child of Budour Al Qassar, a young Kuwaiti, for whom the blog acted as a food journal and a way of documenting her experiments in the kitchen. "I started blogging one Ramadan day three years ago out of boredom and after obsessing over international food blogs for over a year. Also, I started it as a way to document my experiments in the kitchen, hence the name."

Budour's passion for food began at the young age of eleven when she picked up her first cookbook that belonged to her older sibling and tried out her first recipe. "The first thing I tried making is a Swiss roll, a sponge cake filled with strawberry jam, and for the next three years the Swiss roll was my specialty."

Interest

"Throughout my high school years, my interest for cooking was lost, but that passion was reignited during my first year of university in New York City. I spent that year eating my way through the city, exploring new cuisines and introducing my palate to

new flavors. This marked the beginning of my obsession with food."

The number of food blogs has grown exponentially and it is important to find a niche and say things people enjoy reading or learning. Budour's posts are few, but interesting and quirky, her photographs are arresting. From leftover mulakhiya sandwiches to zany kitchen gadgets, it is all there in her blog. "Most food blogs are all about creating new dishes and have a big emphasis on food styling and photography."

"The Oven Experiments is simpler than that. I mainly feature my own creations and interesting cool kitchen gadgets I find online. I rarely feature restaurants." Budour initially hoped that blogging would entice her to further experiment in the kitchen trying out new things, but things were not to be. "I am an extremely moody person when it comes to cooking and baking. I have to be in the right mood to be in the kitchen but once I am, even if it is past midnight, nothing can stop me. This changed when I started receiving more visitors to my blog and gaining more interactions."

Encouraging

"I became more passionate about encouraging people to be in the kitchen and start cooking. I even created an 'Express' category for those who are intimidated by the kitchen." Budour Al Qassar's blog is simple and not deceptively so. One of her recent entries include her experiments with summer food. Here Budour shares some of her experiments with guiltless summer treats. The recipes are easy and the ingredients within reach. All you need to do

is cook up a storm and enjoy.

Date oatmeal with bananas

A hearty morning treat that's both quick and delicious!

Makes one portion

In a small saucepan, combine 1/4 cup fine oat flakes with 1/2 cup water, a sprinkle of freshly ground cinnamon, a pinch of salt and two chopped dates. Mix over medium heat until thick. Remove from heat and spoon into your favorite bowl.

Add sliced ripe bananas and a dash of cinnamon. Enjoy with your favorite herbal tea.

SriLanka red rice with beetroot and coriander

A refreshing lunch that can be served warm or at room temperature.

Prepare one cup of rice by washing, until the water runs clear.

In a heavy-bottomed pan heat

one tablespoon cooking oil. Add two cardamom pods, two cloves, 1/2 a cinnamon stick and two curry leaves. Add the washed rice and two cups water and cook over high heat. When the water is absorbed, reduce to very low heat and cook until the rice is done.

Boil two medium sized beetroots until tender. Peel and dice the beetroots after they cooled down. Dress with a drizzle of olive oil, lemon juice from half a lemon and a handful of chopped coriander.

Mix the rice with the beetroots and serve.

Frozen bananas with peanut butter, cinnamon and almonds

Inspired by the Food Network Channel and the Food Revolution Event in Kuwait that was held at Chef Boutique, I customized this fun

frozen treats with my favorite ingredients: peanut butter and cinnamon.

Serves 3

You need 4 very ripe bananas, frozen for at least 3 hours, 3 tablespoons natural peanut butter, ground cinnamon, a couple of sprinkles, almonds flakes, or slivers, toasted.

In a food processor, pulse all ingredients, except for the almonds until smooth and creamy.

Scoop into individual ice cream cups and sprinkles with almond flakes and enjoy!

Mango sorbet popsicles

When mangoes are in season and at their peak, all you really need are mangoes, preferable Alphonso, and the zest of one lemon to put this sorbet together. One mango yields one popsicle.

Cut the mango in half and scoop out the flesh and place in a food processor with some lemon zest, pulse until smooth. Spoon the puree into your prepared popsicle tray and freeze until set.

Alternatively place the puree in an ice cream machine to make the mango sorbet.

Watermelon popsicles

This is the simplest and most refreshing of all summer treats!

As long as you make sure you are using a sweet watermelon.

To make this treat, simply cut the watermelon into thick rectangles and then insert popsicle sticks in the middle. Prepare a tray with wax paper and place the watermelon popsicles and freeze for an hour before enjoying.



Budour Al-Qassar