



Coconut History

It is likely that the coconut originated in East Asia, probably in Melanesia, (the Southwestern Pacific) where it exists in great variety. The pods, which are the seeds, float and they were probably dispersed around the Pacific Islands by ocean currents. The seed with all that fiber and oil was the perfect botanical boat.

The word is a combination of the Portuguese for goblin shell and the English word "nut". The coconut is mentioned as being in East Africa in 60 A.D. There is speculation that it was brought there from Madagascar.

The first English language reference to coconut was 1555. Coconuts were eaten in Egypt in the 6th century AD and Marco Polo found them in India and other places in Asia. A 1770 recipe for coconut puffs from a South Carolina cookbook includes grated coconut, butter, sugar, eggs and rose water.

Food historians believe coconuts were not indigenous to the Caribbean islands where they became a staple, but were probably introduced by Europeans. There is general consensus that the coconut landed in the U.S. after an 1879 shipwreck off Palm Beach washed up a cargo of coconuts and the seeds sprouted en masse. The town gets its name from the coconut trees that grew there. Coconuts were not known in Hawaii before the 19th century.

Today the coconut is the most extensively grown and used nut in the world and the most important palm. It is an important commercial crop in many tropical countries including India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, The Philippines, and Brazil, contributing significantly to their economies.