



cocoa nibs

What are Cocoa Nibs?

Cocoa nibs are the kernels of the cocoa bean, which grows on the *Theobroma cacao*, or cocoa tree. The cocoa tree is native to Central America and northern South America and thrives in a climate of high humidity and rainfall.² The tree grows to a height of between 5–8 metres.¹



Originally eaten in the tropical rainforests of Central America, cocoa has been part of the human diet for over 2000 years.¹ The first cacao plantation is thought to have been established in about 400 BC¹ but there is archaeological evidence that cocoa was consumed as early as 600BC by the Preclassic Maya.³ By 250 AD, the Mayans had depicted cocoa in carvings, paintings and hieroglyphics. Cocoa beans were very important to Maya and Aztec societies, thought to play a role in religious ceremonies and act as a form of currency.¹

Cocoa was commonly enjoyed as a drink by the Aztecs, who combined it with maize and vanilla, before it was discovered by the Spanish and became popular in Europe.⁴ The word cocoa is an Anglicisation of cacao⁵ which is itself derived from xocolatl, meaning 'bitter water' in the Aztec language of Nahuatl.¹

Processing

Our cocoa nibs are grown in Peru, in their native habitat of the Amazon rainforest. They are grown by local cooperatives that use traditional, organic farming methods. A sympathetic approach to the growing environment is vital and our cocoa nibs are only sourced from suppliers who promote sustainability.

In late spring, the mature cocoa pods are hand-cut from the trees with a machete. The cocoa pods are then cut open so the seeds and pulp can be scooped out. The sweet pulp is left on the seeds while they ferment, a process that takes about a week. The cocoa beans are then placed into large crates, where they are continually rotated to prevent overheating. During this fermentation process, the seeds transform from purple to brown and begin to develop their much-loved flavour.



After fermentation, the beans are sun-dried for another week before being carefully cleaned and sorted. Once any contaminating impurities have been eliminated, the beans are separated from the husks and broken up into small crunchy, delicious cocoa nibs.⁶

The Science

Cocoa was traditionally utilised as a form of medicine^{7 8} and recently scientists have been discovering that there may actually have been a basis to this usage. Cocoa contains high quantities of flavonoids, which are a form of antioxidant phytochemical found in plants.⁹ Flavonoids are thought to help reduce the risk of cardiovascular mortality.⁸



Flavanol is a flavonoid with particular importance in cocoa; it is thought to be able to help reduce health problems such as heart disease.¹⁰ Further antioxidant activity is derived from the procyanidins present in cocoa.¹¹ These polyphenolic compounds prevent cell damage by putting an end to chain reactions that are caused by free radicals. Cocoa nibs are also a source of magnesium, which help keep bones healthy.¹²

As with all our products, there are no additives in our cocoa nibs. The purity of the product means you do not consume all the added sugar, dairy and chemicals that normally go into making chocolate products. These sugars can lead to conditions such as diabetes and effectively cancel out the positive impact of the cocoa's antioxidant activity. Naturya's cocoa nibs only contain the naturally occurring sugar that makes up 1% of the total product.

How to enjoy Cocoa

Cocoa nibs are delicious, both as a snack and an ingredient. Use them in baking to give desserts an authentic chocolate flavour. You can put them in a trail mix, scatter them over cereals or simply eat them straight from the bag. They are a fine addition to smoothies as well, combining particularly well with lucuma.

As ever, feel free to experiment. If you come up with a great recipe then why not send it to us along with some pictures? The best recipes stand a chance of winning some free Naturya products and being uploaded to our site for everyone to try!

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