

Cocoa Powder Class



Cocoa Powder

- Theobroma cacao, or more commonly known as the cocoa tree, is an evergreen tree in the genus Theobroma, within the family Malvaceae. It is also known as the cocoa tree or the cacao tree. The fatty seeds that grow on the tree are the actual basis for chocolate. The word Theobroma actually means “food of the gods” in Latin, while the word cacao derives from the Aztec language. It actually derives from the word xocolatl, meaning “bitter water.” The cocoa tree is native to Central and South America and was first exported to Europe in 1585. The culinary uses of the cocoa tree have been in use for over 2,000 years, however there is evidence of cacao beverages dating all the way back to 1900 B.C. Did you know that during the time of the Aztecs in Mexico, cocoa beans were actually used as a form of currency?
- The cocoa tree can grow anywhere from 13 to 26 feet high. The leaves of the tree are alternating and unlobed, growing anywhere from 4-16 inches long and 2-8 inches wide. Small pink flowers grow in clusters directly on the trunk of the tree and on older branches, growing from .4 inches to .8 inches in diameter. The actual cocoa beans grow from within the fruit of the tree. The fruit, called a cacao pod, is oval shaped and ranges from yellow to orange in color. It grows to about 6-12 inches long, 3-4 inches wide, and will weigh about 1.1 pound when ripe. Each fruit contains anywhere from 20-60 beans embedded within.
- Actual cocoa powder made from the cocoa beans can be used in many different products and industries. While its obvious use is for culinary purposes, it can also be used for medicinal purposes, skin care, hair care, bath and body products, and for the soap making process. Common products it can be used in are soaps, facial masks, scrubs, lotions, ointments, creams, facial toner, shampoos and conditioners, lip balm, massage oil, and bath bombs. Did you know that in Europe, the first chocolate bar was not made until 1848?



Growing Conditions

- Just like any other plant or tree on the Earth, the cocoa tree has its own specific conditions needed for it to grow to its fullest potential. It grows best when planted in climates similar to those of Central and South America. It thrives in very humid environments, however it does not necessarily have to be an extremely hot environment, just as long as it is in subtropical and/or tropical conditions. The cocoa tree grows best when planted in light soils with good drainage. While it is grown in tropical areas, it does need to be planted in areas with coverage. Full sun exposure can actually harm the tree and its leaves.
- The actual growth process for a cocoa tree takes longer than you may expect. The flowers on the tree only begin to grow 2 to 3 years after being planted. The actual fruit of the tree will take even longer. It will begin to grow around 5 years after the tree is first planted. The fruits only grow for about 150-180 days throughout the years but should not be picked until they are ripe and are a yellowish-orange color. However, it will not hurt if a fruit that is not completely ripe is used. Once the fruit is picked, it can be broke open and the seeds scooped out for use.
- There are some pests and diseases that can affect the cocoa tree. Many insects can feed on and destroy the tree and fruit such as the cocoa capsids or cocoa mirids, as well as the cocoa pod borer. It can also be affected by many fungi such as the frosty pod rot and wilt. Some rats, woodpeckers, squirrels, and even mistletoe can also effect the plant and possibly give it infections.



Cocoa Powder Uses in Industries

Food and Beverages

- The most obvious and well known use of cocoa is for food and beverage purposes. The cocoa bean is the basis for chocolate, and cocoa powder is also made from the cocoa bean. Cocoa powder and chocolate are used mainly for dessert purposes, such as brownies, cookies, cakes, and pudding. It can also be an ingredient for snacks like granola bars. Cocoa powder can also be used to sprinkle over baked goods for its taste. Hot chocolate is one of the many beverages that are made with cocoa powder as well as chocolate flavored coffee and milkshakes.

Bath and Body Products

- Cocoa powder can be used for many different products and industries including foods and beverages, skin care, hair care, soaping, medicinal purposes, and for many bath and body products. When used in the soap making process, cocoa powder will give the soap a nice natural brown color.
- Common products that can include cocoa powder are face masks, lip balm, bath bombs, shampoos and conditioners, soaps, lotions, scrubs, creams, ointments, massage oils, and facial toners.
- There are many skin care benefits from cocoa powder. It helps to promote healthy skin tissues, firm and renew new skin cells, and promotes healthy cell development. It also works as an antioxidant and helps to repair any damaged skin, improves blood flow to the skin, helps to improve skin hydration and complexion, and it even absorbs UV light into the skin.
- For hair care, there are many benefits to cocoa powder as well. It helps to soften, smooth, and moisturize dry hair, as well as promoting shinier hair with more elasticity. It can also work to help stop hair loss due to stress.



Uses in Industries

Cont.

Medicinal

- There are many medicinal benefits to using cocoa powder as well. Cocoa powder actually contains many minerals that are important to the body such as magnesium, calcium, copper, potassium, zinc, sodium, and phosphorous. It is a powerful antioxidant and also contains many important vitamins like vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, C, E, and also pantothenic acid.
- Cocoa powder can actually help the heart by lowering bad cholesterol, lowering blood pressure, and it can help to protect the heart from disease and stroke.
- It works as a mood enhancer and antidepressant because it contains many compounds that actually have a positive effect on brain chemistry. The compounds help to increase serotonin and endorphin levels, which in turn enhances a person's mood, making them happier.
- Cocoa contains a very high amount of antioxidants called polyphenols. By drinking hot chocolate or other drinks with cocoa, the polyphenols contained can help the body to fight against cancer.
- Cocoa powder also helps to boost the immune system and helps to increase the oxygen levels to the brain for people with diseases like dementia.



Other Uses

- The Aztecs and Mayans believed that the cocoa tree would bring them immortality.
- Cocoa powder was also mixed with tobacco and smoked by the Aztecs.
- Christopher Columbus was among the first Europeans to ever encounter cocoa in 1502. He and his crew captured a canoe off of an island of Honduras. They actually referred to the cocoa beans as almonds.
- Nature's Garden sells [cocoa powder](#) for external use only. We do not sell it as a food item. The information above talks about how great cocoa powder is for many industries, however we only sell it for external use. We provide this data for educational purposes only. Nothing in this article is to be construed as medical advice. Please consult your doctor before using this product or any of this information for treatment purposes.
- Make sure to check out all our amazing free recipes that are actually made with cocoa butter! Try out our [Chocolate Sugar Scrub](#), our [Hot Fudge Brownies Soap](#), or even our [Neapolitan Ice Cream Sugar Scrub](#)!

