

Cathy's Corner

Carob

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness, saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, . . . and his meat was locusts and wild honey." Matthew 3:1-4

The locust (*Ceratonia siliqua*) is the fruit of the carob tree, and accepted in the East as the food on which John the Baptist fed; thus it is known as St. John's bread. The carob tree is a sturdy evergreen, growing to fifty feet in height. In the early spring it produces many large clusters of tiny pea-shaped blossoms. Rich brown fruits follow in the form of large thick pods 8" long containing 5-15 seeds which are discarded.

Chocolate has been satisfying the sweet tooth of America for many years. However, as it grows naturally, it is highly unpalatable, bitter and unpleasant, and requires additives including large amounts of sugar, milk or cream to transform it into the tantalizing product on your grocer's shelf, having at least 50% of its calories in saturated fat which causes heart trouble.

Chocolate contains theobromine (a harmful alkaloid causing abnormal gland growth, headaches, sleeplessness, depression, upset stomach, itching, and flushing of the skin), and tannin (thought to cause cancer of the digestive tract), and may contain high amounts of caffeine and theophylline. These poisons must be flushed out of the system by the kidneys and liver. Children who drink cocoa are more likely to have bedwetting problems. Chocolate has recently been incriminated in prostate enlargement in men.

Harvesting of the cacao beans occurs in tropical countries where sanitation levels fall far below those in the US. Workers cut pods from the cacao tree and beans are piled in the farmer's yard and allowed to ferment for 3 to 8 days. This process is essential to developing the flavor.

During this process, children and adults walk over the piles; insects, rodents, small animals and other living things make their nests in the piles, and any type of contamination may occur during this primary processing stage of chocolate.

The U. S. Department of Health publishes a booklet entitled "The Food Defect Action Levels" and lists specifications of "current levels for natural or unavoidable defects in food" for chocolate in the form of "insect, rodent, and other natural contaminants" allowed by the FDA. Tolerance levels for chocolate and chocolate liquor, used in the manufacture of such products as Hershey's chocolate, are up to 120 insect fragments per cup (8 oz) or 2 rodent hairs per cup. That means the Hershey's chocolate bar you eat may contain one rodent hair and 16 insect parts, and yet carry the FDA's blessing.

For chocolate powder or pressed cakes used for baking, there must be no more than 75 insect parts in 3 tablespoons of powder. Up to 4% of the cacao beans may be infested by insects. Rat droppings or other animal excreta must not exceed 10 milligrams per pound!

At a meeting of the Society for Clinical Ecology, a member related this experience. In an endeavor to track down the source of allergenic substances, he visited a South American country to study the cacao bean. He began at the site where it was grown and traced it all the way through the manufacturing process. At one point he went down to the docks where the beans stood on open wharves awaiting shipment. On opening one of the crates he found it alive with cockroaches. He estimates that one-fourth of chocolate consists of dead, ground-up, melted-down cockroaches, and that is one of the factors that make it such a common allergen.

Carob

Carob powder from the locust pod is a healthful chocolate substitute. Gram for gram, carob contains three times the calcium that milk does. It is high in phosphorus and potassium, and contains Vitamin A, B1 (thiamine), B3 (niacin), and iron. Carob is rich in protein and high in natural carbohydrates. It is 60% lower in calories than chocolate, and is high in minerals, low in fat, and produces no known allergic reactions. Carob contains no caffeine or other stimulants, and requires no fermentation. Best of all, no insect fragments!

Carob chips are also readily available at most health food stores but may contain added sugar and/or tropical oil, so beware!

If you're like the rest of us, from time to time your sweet tooth declares "feed me!" and you will be happy to learn there are some delicious alternatives.

Goody Bar

In small bowl in microwave, melt

½ cup carob chips until smooth.

Stir in a spoonful chunky peanut butter.

Pour onto a sheet of plastic wrap and spread into candy bar shape.

You can add a few almonds.

(It's delicious, but don't eat it all yet!) Freeze and enjoy!

Carob Fudge

Warm in saucepan until well blended

¼ C. water

½ C. peanut butter

½ C. dates

2 Tbs. honey

1 tsp. vanilla

Mix dry ingredients in separate bowl

½ C. carob powder

½ C. sesame seeds

½ C. sunflower seeds

1 C. coconut

Add warm ingredients. After well mixed, press onto a flat tray. Top with coconut.

Freeze, slice & enjoy.

Carob

Simply Divine Brownies

Whiz in blender:

1 C. water

¼ C. oil

¾ C. honey

1 tsp. salt

½ C. carob powder

1 C. flour

Optional: stir in (do not blend)

½ C. chopped nuts.

Pour into 8" pan coated with PAM. Bake at 300 for 40 minutes (or until knife inserted in center comes out clean).

Tropical Chewies

Cream together:

¼ C. margarine (or oil)

¼ C. orange juice concentrate

½ C. honey

½ tsp. vanilla

Slowly add:

½ C. crushed pineapple (drained)

1 C. flour

½ tsp. salt

¾ C. oats

½ C. wheat germ

½ C. chopped nuts

½ C. unsweetened coconut

¾ C. carob chips (or raisins)

Bake at 350 until brown.