

# HOW TO OPEN A COCONUT

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Step-by-step, photo illustrated instructions on how to open a coconut and grate it. It's much easier than you might think to open up a fresh coconut and grate the meat inside for your next recipe.

From Coconut Cakes to Coconut Cream Pies and so many other dishes, you'll love the distinctly different taste of using fresh coconut. We'll show you how.



### How To Open A Coconut:

It's so easy these days to pick up a bag or even a can of flake coconut so, you might wonder why in the world you'd want to go to the trouble of opening and grating a fresh coconut. The answer is easy...TASTE. It's all about the taste. Now, I'll admit, it does take a little work and effort but, the results will be well worth the effort.

Growing up here in North Carolina, I watched my mom take daddy's hammer and whack open more than a few coconuts in her time. It was a time to get closer in the kitchen because once the coconut was opened, I knew I had to get a bite of it. I'd watch closely as she poked a nail or screwdriver into one of the coconut "eyes" as they are called. Then, she'd flip it over on a mason jar or a glass and let the water inside drain out. Maybe, just maybe, she'd even let me take a sip after she would open it up.

With hammer in one hand and, a towel and coconut in the other, she'd give that coconut a good whacking around the middle. She'd hit it once, turn it slightly and hit it again...until it would finally break open. That's when you could see all that lovely white interior of goodness. Of course, the hard part was yet to come. Getting that white part out...was sometimes a little tricky. She'd persist though, wiggling a butter knife around the edges and, I'd always end up the happy recipient of one of the smaller pieces that would break off. It was like candy as I'd chew away on it.

Mama always did most of the actual grating of the coconut. She'd let me give it a try if I asked but, it wasn't as easy as she made it appear to be. As I grated this one in the pictures, I couldn't help but think back to how she took the time and effort to make those delicious fresh coconut cakes we all loved. When I mentioned to my older brother the other day that I was working on one, he quickly declared that fresh coconut cake was his all time favorite. You think that might have been a hint? Older brothers....gotta love them.

The first time you open up a coconut of your own, you may wonder exactly what possessed you to do so. But, do like mama and push on through and, you'll have a bowl full of freshly grated coconut in no time at all. Then, use it for our Fresh Coconut Cake Recipe or in a Coconut Cream Pie and enjoy the difference that fresh coconut can bring to the table. Don't be shy...you can do it. Ready to give it a try? Let's Get Cooking! Er...I mean...cracking!



**How To Open A Coconut:** You'll need a coconut or, maybe two and, a few simple household tools.



Now days, at least around here, coconuts come wrapped in some type of netting. They are a bit messy with all that "hair" and I guess the netting helps keep that from making such a big mess in the produce counter. You'll need to cut the netting away of course. Aren't they cute...with those big brown EYES...I feel like I should name them.



The three brown spots are called "eyes." It looks more like two eyes and a mouth though. When you purchase your coconut, be sure the eyes don't have any area where it looks like the liquid might have leaked out. Like yours...they should be clear. You'll also want to shake your coconut while you're in the store. You should be able to hear a good amount of liquid sloshing around inside and the coconut should feel "heavy" to you for it's size. Look it over and make sure it doesn't have any cracks in it already.



At least one, maybe two, of the eyes will be somewhat softer than the others. You can find this one by taking a nail, clean screwdriver or, a punch of some sort and just pressing it into that eye area. Then, carefully place the punching device into the center of the brown spot and hold it securely.



Take a hammer and give the top of the screwdriver a slight tap. It shouldn't take a lot to puncture the coconut. You may even hear air under pressure being released when you do it. Wiggle the punch around a bit and open the eye up as much as you can.





Now, grab a glass or jar and, flip the coconut upside down on top of it so the water inside can drain into the jar. RESIST the urge to stick a straw into the coconut and sip it like you've seen on TV. You really don't want to do that just yet. Let all the juice drain into your container. Set the water aside for the moment. It can be refrigerated for a day or two or, freeze it in an airtight container for use later. If you grate or shred your coconut, you can add the liquid back into the grated coconut and freeze it all together. It's best to strain out any particles that might be in the water before freezing or use.



This particular brand of coconut was called a "[Groovy Coconut](#)." Once you remove the netting, you'll see one or two grooves that have been cut into the coconut. No, they don't grow that way. These are cut into the coconut to help you open it easier. Some have just one groove and then some have a type of intersecting groove. Just depends on what is available at your grocer. If your's doesn't happen to have a groove, it's no problem.



You'll find various methods on the Internet on how to actually open a coconut. This is just the way we've always done it around our house. Some people put them in bags and smash them on the sidewalk or driveway. If you don't have a hammer, I suppose that's the next best way. This works pretty good and you don't even have to go outside. Please, please, please though....grab a towel to hold it. You can thank me later. Place the towel in your hand and lay the coconut on top of the towel.



Take your hammer and start tapping around the middle of the coconut. In my case, I tapped around the groove that was cut into my coconut. You have to tap it firmly but not real hard. Just tap it, turn it, tap again and keep rolling it in your hand until it cracks open. By the way, that's the hammer that belonged to my dad. One of my small treasures.

**Warning:** The next photo isn't what a coconut is suppose to look like inside. I'm just telling you in advance because you need to know these things.



THIS is why you DON'T want to be sticking a straw into a coconut like this. I know it's not pretty but...it happens. It's not suppose to look like this once you get it open. Apparently the grocery store I bought my coconuts from doesn't sell a lot of them. The meat has spots that are clearly visible and if you are brave enough to taste it...it's yucky. Take my word for it. Either throw it away or return to the store you bought it from for an exchange or refund. You DON'T want to use this. Of course, the water inside was also bad and I threw that away. Imagine if you'd stuck a straw inside and took a big sip. Yuck! Enough said...let's move on now.....to something prettier.



THIS is more like it. All white meat inside and it smells like fresh coconut when you sniff it. That spot on the right side is where I punched it to drain the water out. Now we're getting somewhere.



**BE CAREFUL:** The following steps really require you to be careful. Sharp objects are involved and the meat of the coconut is pretty firm. Getting it out of the shell can be a bit of a task and I really can't emphasize enough how careful you need to be.

Having said that, take a good pairing knife and carefully make two cuts in the meat of the coconut. I started down at the middle..or bottom...of the meat and cut a V shape out of it. I think you'll find this step makes it a bit easier to remove the meat.



Now, carefully slip the knife between the meat of the coconut...the white part...and the outer shell...the brown part. You could use a butter knife for this or, even the clean screwdriver you punched the eyes with. Just BE CAREFUL. I suggest you place the coconut down on your cutting board or counter top and NOT hold it in your hand while you do this.





OK...I got a bit lucky with this one. The V-shape cutout helps and, after running the edge of the knife all around the meat, I was able to pop the meat out of this half pretty much in one piece. I suspect this is more of a sign of the aging of my coconut other than my own skills.

**EXTRA TIP:** Some folks will place the unopened coconut inside a heated oven once they drain the water out. Mama never did this and I've never tried it myself. Although, I think I will when I get my next coconut. It's suppose to make it easier to remove the meat from the shell. All you have to do to try it is pre-heat your oven to about 325°. Drain the water from the coconut and place the whole empty coconut on a baking sheet. Slide it into the warm oven for about 15-20 minutes and then remove it. Once it's cooled enough to touch, use the above steps to crack it open. The meat is suppose to be easier to remove this way. Does it dry out the meat any? I really can't say since I've

not tried it. Maybe I can update this post later and let you know. Sometimes, the coconut will even crack open inside the oven once it starts to warm up.



This is more likely what you'll get as you try to pry the meat out....smaller pieces. It's OK though because you'll end up working with smaller pieces in the long run once you start to grate it.



If you need to, you can always place the coconut down on the cutting board and whack it again to break the shell more. The whole process is pretty much a “do what you have too” type of thing.



Finally, your hard work will pay off and you'll have all the meat safely removed from the shell. You've done good. Your reward is yet to come.



OK...we're making progress. All the meat is out. Now, we just have to cut away the brown layer of skin that's on the backside that was next to the shell. Use a good pairing knife and carefully cut the skin away as best you can. You'll certainly want to remove it all but, it's not quite as easy as peeling a potato. Yes, a vegetable peeler works good as well.



You'll probably end up with some small bits and pieces along the way. But hey...they're really good to nibble on while you work. I think coconut oil may be good for the skin also.



Before you know it...you'll have it all peeled. What next? You can freeze these pieces just like they are and save them for later...or...you can go ahead and grate them. If you decide to freeze them now, it's recommended that you place them in a freezer type plastic bag and remove as much of the air as possible before sealing the bag. Pop the bag in your freezer and you'll be steps ahead when you're ready for that cake or pie.



Or...you can go ahead and grate it...by hand of course. Well, if you're really feeling old fashioned, it's the only way mama ever knew how to do it.

If you have a good food processor, you might want to try using that. I've not tried it and can't speak of it's success. Then too, there are numerous tools available online or, at your local kitchen store, that are made just for this purpose. Some look interesting and if you plan on doing this often, it might be worth looking into. Most appear to be a type of scraper that you scrape the coconut out of the shell with. You might want to check those out if interested. I'm going for the old fashioned tradition with my Fresh Coconut Cake...so...I guess I'll do it the hard way.





This box type grater is capable of doing several different styles of cuts. Each side offers something different. Here's an example of one side that produces a larger type of flake. This would be good for a garnish or finish on top of a cake or pie but....it's not what I'm really looking for.



THIS is more like what I remember. Much smaller flakes although it will take a little more work. It'll be worth the effort though.



No doubt about it...this COULD be a bit of a knuckle buster. You really want to be careful while grating the meat. I found that the curve of the piece of coconut seemed to work best when placing my thumb inside the curve. From there....you just keep the piece in motion until you can't hold onto what's left. Again, it's one of those "do what you have to" processes that you just continue to push forward with until you're finished. What else can I say about it? I can't even begin to imagine how many times mama must have done this very thing...just because she loved us.



If you hang in there....you'll find find that last piece. You'll have pushed through and succeeded with the project. Those little bits on the right hand side are down to as close as I could get. I wanted every flake.



And for the record, I measured it out. This ONE coconut provided 3 full cups of grated coconut. I measured out 2 cups and that's what you see in the bowl on the left. I had just over one cup left in the measuring cup on the right. I wanted to weigh it but the battery was dead in my kitchen scales. So much for that.

At this point, I felt quite proud of myself and decided to take the rest of the day off.

Now, let me tell you a little more about my coconut cracking adventures. I stated already that I bought two coconuts and one was bad. It's not typical and I think I just ran into some that have been around for awhile. I guess there's not really a lot of calls for whole coconuts anymore. A week before, I purchased two coconuts and BOTH of those were bad. I don't think they were from the

same company though.

When I cracked open the first one, things went pretty good despite the fact that it had some bad spots inside and couldn't be used. On the second one, I wasn't using a towel and after about the second whack with the hammer, the shell jumped open and "bit my finger." "Ouch Charlie...that hurts!" It really did. The shell opened up and pinched my thumb. At first I thought it was bleeding but then realized it didn't break the skin. A big blood blister popped up instead and a week later...I still have signs of it. I'm in hopes it will eventually go away but it's taking a long time. I think I'll be alright though. Thank you for your concern and tremendous outpouring of support. You're so kind to me. (Smile)

Anyway...that's my story and I'm sticking to it. Want to see?

I don't have a "Recipe" for this. I hope the pictures have been helpful and that you'll venture into the realm of Fresh Coconut one day soon. I really do taste a difference in it and I think you will too. It freezes well so, I suggest you might just open the coconut and freeze the meat after you removed it...for another day.

**Enjoy!**