



LIFE-SAVING, FAT-FILLED TROPICAL MIRACLE FOOD

The sweat was pouring off us in the heavy midday heat on Bali.

After hiking in the low mountains around the garden and rice paddies, passed down from his father, we were a little tired from the hundred-degree heat... and from walking all afternoon. And we were about as thirsty as you can get.

Just at the moment we stopped to look out over the plateau, a girl who works on one of the nearby plantations came walking by with a bundle of coconuts.

"May I have two of those?" Westi asked her.

She gave us two of the coconuts.

Westi set them on the ground, and produced what looked like a narrow meat cleaver.

"We call this a Bali knife. Very useful."

Turns out, Westi is the master of understatement. I discovered he uses it for *everything*.

He handed it to me.

"That's incredibly beautiful."



The "half knife-half hatchet" given to me by my friend Westi for cutting open coconuts the "Bali" way.

I had never seen anything like it. I gave it back to him... and then my new friend did something I had never seen.

He sat down on the ground and grabbed a coconut. With incredible speed and ease he shaved off a little piece and set it aside. Then he chopped a V-shaped hole with his heavy knife, chopped a slit perpendicular to it, picked up the shaved piece, bent it a little, and made a spout.



Buying coconuts at a small, roadside shop on the edge of the forest.

Voila! Drinking Cup!

In a few seconds we were drinking cool, refreshing coconut water right from the source.

Everywhere I've traveled they have a different way of opening a coconut, and his was the best I've ever seen.

I really appreciated the cool drink at the time in the heavy heat and altitude...

On the day I was to leave, Westi made a little presentation of giving me my own Bali knife as a present.

It's like a half-knife, half hatchet. The Balinese use them as all-purpose tools.

He grabbed a coconut off a nearby tree so I could film him using my new knife to demonstrate how to make a drinking cup out of a coconut.

Here I was, struggling for years to cut open coconuts at my house in Florida... and now I've got a Bali knife.

I've managed not to cut myself too badly using it in my yard, too.

It's great because I used to spill the water all over the place when I chopped open coconuts. But I'm getting the hang of my Bali knife. Now I can drink coconut water right from the source.



We have coconut palms here in South Florida. Seeing them always gives me the feeling of lazy afternoons at the beach and warm tropical breezes.

Luckily, I have coconut trees in my yard. I love to eat coconut... but until I got my Bali knife, it always involved a great deal of care and skill to get them open.

Now I don't have to worry about it anymore, thanks to Westi.

Of course, I still have to get the coconuts down from the tree, which isn't easy. Climbing a straight, smooth coconut palm is a trick. You can tie your feet together with a rope and shimmy up, and I've done that. But it's no picnic!



Coconuts Provide “All the Necessities of Life”

In Jamaica they seem to be able to literally run up the palm trees. It's a lot harder than it looks, and I still haven't quite mastered it. I've tried it while in Jamaica because we would gather coconuts constantly, since they use coconuts for everything. In fact, I think of them as a staple food now.

When I traveled to India and visited the home of Ayurvedic medicine, the world's oldest health care system, one of my favorite things I learned was their name for the coconut palm tree.

They call the coconut palm *kalpa vriksha*, which means, “the tree which provides all the necessities of life.” It's a fitting name. The tree of life.

Coconuts are an excellent way to get protein and natural fiber. They also have zero starch, and the brain-healthy nutrient choline.



Coconut Oil “De-Ages” and Beautifies Your Skin

When I went to Jamaica, I learned that they press the flesh of the coconut to make oil for their skin. It doesn't take too much. You can put it on a flat surface and just roll a round coffee cup over it and get some oil.

Lelir makes a lip balm out of coconut oil. She uses Balinese bitter orange leaves and infuses them with the coconut oil. And she makes moisturizing oil they call “Sweet Dream.” It is coconut oil-based and takes an entire month to brew.

Jamaicans use coconut oil both internally and externally. They use it in makeup as a base and as a skin and hair conditioner. Warm coconut oil can cure dried out and damaged hair.

They also flavor foods with it, and use it as cooking oil. It's always around the house... it's in every kitchen and probably every bathroom.

My friend in Jamaica, I call him “Rasta,” showed me how they scrape the coconut out of the shell and mash it up. We used a grater, like you would use for cheese and scraped it off that way.

Then I put the shredded coconut in a big pot of water — a lot of water, like maybe ten times as much as the coconut — and Rasta and I boiled it.

It looked to me like a kind of coconut stew and bubbled like a cauldron. It eventually looked like lava bubbling slowly. When it stopped bubbling, all the water was gone. There was only coconut oil. We put the coconut oil into jars to cool at room temperature until it was solid. And to make it a liquid again, we just put the jar outside in the heat.

I like nuts cooked in coconut oil. Peanuts are really good. Almonds are very popular in Jamaica, too. Almond trees are all over the place. They take the almonds, dry them in the oven and then char them a little in coconut oil.

