

An Unusual Culinary Column: Date Discovery

By Karen Kain

This month I am inspired to share with you a few of my latest date discoveries. Dates are not only a healthy alternative sweetener to sugar; they are also a super food and therefore, very good for you. There are health specialists that suggest eating one date a day is necessary for a balanced and healthy diet. Dates are known to prevent abdominal cancer; maintain healthy weight; promote healthy bowel movements; boost energy; strengthen bones; boost the nervous system; increase sexual stamina; provide energy for anemic patients; reduce the risk of stroke; diminish allergic reactions and finally, dates help to lower night blindness.

First, I wanted to revisit the "date shake" for the simple fact that I love date shakes. This is a filling and delicious snack. I started making it with just avocado, almond milk, ice and 6-8 dates and loved it. You can make your own version adding bananas, vanilla extract and chocolate nibs. I am going to stick with the simple version because it is just perfect!

Next I tried making horchata. I love horchata and after seeing the ingredients I realized just why it is so filling. This recipe replaces the sugar with dates, which makes it healthier; it is easy to make this refreshing drink and is best served over ice, sprinkled with cinnamon.

I also wanted to try some healthier dessert recipes. Keeping with the date theme, I came across this Strawberry Cheesecake recipe.

It was super easy to make and I knew immediately that this was a delicious healthy dessert that will keep at bay those sugar cravings. I especially loved the crust and look forward to playing with more recipes along this line.

I am very happy to have the sun shining and excited about getting my hands into the ground to grow some healthy foods. As always, I would love to hear what you are cooking. Have a great month!

Date & Avocado Shake



Ingredients:

- 1 Cup almond milk
- 5 Ice cubes
- ½ to 1 Whole avocado
- 6-8 Dates

Directions:

Place all the ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth and creamy.

Christie's Homemade Horchata

Ingredients:

- 1 Cup uncooked rice
- 5 Cups water
- 2 Tablespoons of date paste, (pitted dates)
- 2 Tablespoon of water
- ½ Tablespoon of cinnamon

Directions:

Put 1 cup of rice into the blender and 5 cups of water and blend until the rice is broken up. Let stand at room temperature for a minimum of 3 hours. Strain the rice using a nut milk bag or cheesecloth. Put the date paste and 2 tablespoons of water in a small sauce pan and cook down making a syrup. Place the rice milk, date syrup, cinnamon in a blender and blend until combined and serve on crushed ice sprinkled with cinnamon.

Strawberry Cheesecake

Ingredients:

- Crust:
- 1½ Cups desiccated (finely shredded) coconut *
 - ½ Cup raw cashews
 - 8 Dates
 - Zest of one lemon
- Top:
- 1 Cup of raw cashews
 - Juice of half a lemon
 - 1 Heaping tablespoon honey
 - 1 Cup strawberries, hulled
 - 2 Tablespoons coconut oil
 - ½ Teaspoon vanilla extract
 - Pinch of salt

Directions:

Place 1 cup of raw cashews into a bowl of water, fully covering the nuts and let them soak until you are ready to use them for the topping. Put the crust ingredients into a food processor and blend at high speed until the mixture is sticky and crumbly. Using a square 20cm cake pan lined with parchment paper overhanging the sides, press the crust into the cake pan. I used a small rolling pin (made out of a tumbler glass) and firmly press the crust down.

For the topping – Strain the cashews and add the lemon juice, honey, strawberries, coconut oil, salt, and vanilla extract into a food processor and blend until the mixture is smooth. Pour the topping over the crust, cover and allow to set in the freezer for at least 3 hours.

Side notes - You can double the topping and use an 18cm spring form pan eliminating the parchment paper, if you prefer to make a cake.

*Desiccated coconut is coconut meat that has been dried and has much less moisture than the initial fruit. I used Trader Joe's unsweetened shredded coconut.

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