

Seasonal cook



Photo: Edwina Pickles

Hard nut to crack

Amid the coconut water craze, don't overlook the fragrant flesh, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

Coconut water has suddenly edged out many of the energy drinks from the refrigerated cabinet in my local supermarket. There are claims it reduces cholesterol, contains anti-cancer properties and relieves menstrual cramps as well as hangovers, and big drink companies are using endorsements from celebrities, supermodels and athletes to entice consumers to buy.

While coconut water straight from the coconut can vary from utterly delicious to fermented and acrid, the health claims remain unproven. Only a fraction of a coconut's unique perfume and flavour is contained in the water. Most resides in the mature flesh and getting it out can be tricky. Here's one way to do it without slashing a finger.

Preheat the oven to 190C. The top of the

coconut has three "eyes". Only one of those is soft enough to pierce with a small sharp knife. Make as large a hole as possible in the soft eye and empty the water into a small container. It can keep refrigerated for a week.

Now place the coconut on an oven tray and bake for 15 minutes. The shell should crack cleanly across the middle, along the line of the equator, though you may have to help it along once it's out of the oven by wedging a cleaver or heavy knife in the crack and twisting.

The flesh will come away easily from the shell and can now be used in recipes. Keep coconut pieces in a bowl of cold water on the kitchen bench as a snack. As long as the water is changed each day, it needs no refrigeration. smanfredi@smh.com.au twitter.com/manfredistefano

COCONUT PANNA COTTA

Fresh coconut can be difficult to get outside the city. You can substitute dried shredded coconut.

- 150g fresh coconut flesh
- 600ml milk
- 150ml pure cream
- 90g castor sugar
- 3 "titanium" 5g gelatine leaves or 8 "gold" 2g leaves

Finely grate fresh coconut flesh into a bowl. Place in a saucepan with milk, cream and sugar on a moderate heat, stirring until sugar dissolves completely. Don't boil. Remove and cool slightly. Strain all the liquid into another saucepan or bowl through a few sheets of muslin. Squeeze coconut left in muslin well to release as much liquid as possible. Place saucepan containing liquid back on very low heat. Soak gelatine leaves in bowl of cold water until soft. Squeeze out water and whisk into hot coconut cream until completely dissolved. Strain liquid through a fine sieve into a pouring jug. Pour into eight 80ml moulds and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight. Serve with fresh berries and coconut biscuits (see below).

Serves 8 as dessert (pictured)
Wine Late-picked sauvignon blanc

COCONUT BISCUITS

- 250g butter
- 220g sugar
- 1 tsp pure vanilla essence
- 1 egg
- 380g plain flour
- 10g baking powder
- 170g desiccated coconut

Preheat oven to 175C. Cream butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and egg and mix well. Sift flour and baking powder together and beat into mixture. Incorporate desiccated coconut. Rest in refrigerator for at least 1 hour. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough into a sheet about 1cm thick, then cut into fingers about 8cm long and 2cm wide. Cover two oven trays with baking paper and lay biscuits on top. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on trays. Once completely cool, store in an airtight container. Should keep fresh for about 10 days. Great with black Darjeeling or milky Keemun teas.

Makes about 50 biscuits
Wine Rutherglen tokay

Full bottle

QUAFFING

MANDOLETO NERO
D'AVOLA 2009, \$13

Nero d'avola is a wonderful spicy and, sometimes, robust native red grown all over Sicily, not just near the town of Avola. For the price, this straightforward wine from Mandoleto is a ripper. With fruit sourced from its own vineyards in the beautiful Erice region, it is pure nero d'avola. It has a fragrant warm spice character, especially liquorice, alongside the deep red and blueberry fruits that follow through on the palate. The drink-now wine is a perfect barbecue red.



TRYING

SALOMON UNDHOF KOGL
RIESLING 2010, \$32

Austria produces stunning riesling, particularly from the region known as Lower Austria that takes in Wachau, Kamptal and Kremstal. Salomon is based in the latter area. While the country's indigenous white, gruner veltliner, dominates the scene, Salomon has more riesling planted, with Kogl one of its key vineyards. Vintage 2010 was tough, with lots of rain, but this reveals clean fruit and botrytis from spicy saffron, as well as ripe stone fruit. It's textural and rich but with plenty of mineral acidity and a dry finish.



CELLARING

THE WANDERER
UPPER YARRA VALLEY
PINOT NOIR 2010, \$58

There's a subtlety and restraint with the Wanderer wines crafted by Andrew Marks. This medium-bodied pinot noir is no different. There's amazing fragrance, with florals, menthol and spice; a core of fruit sweetness tempered by complex earthy and forest floor nuances, with ultra-fine tannins and a long finish. The oak is neatly integrated. Will age for five or more years.



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