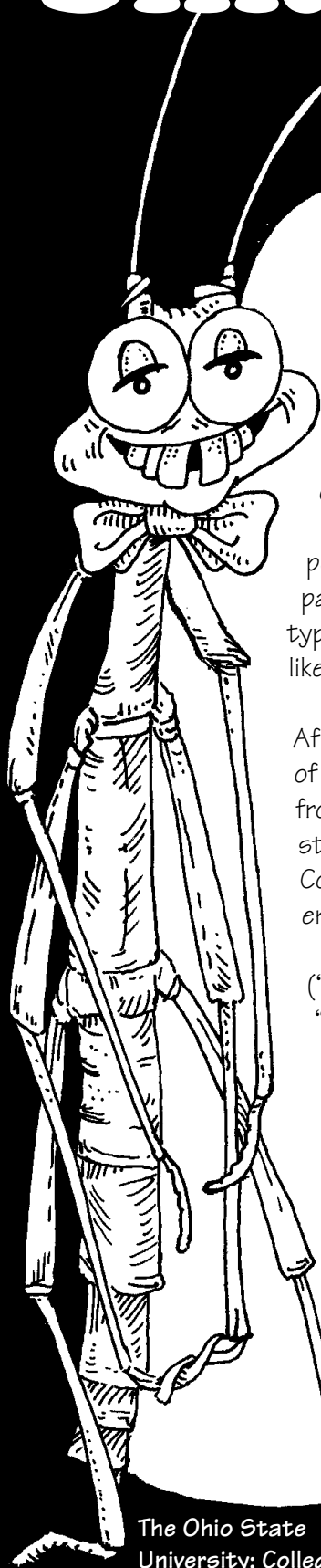


Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



Dear Twig: Are coconuts nuts? —
Davey L. and Jorge E., Wooster, Ohio

A coconut isn't a nut, despite its nutty name. A coconut is a drupe, a word that rhymes with "loop." A drupe is a fleshy fruit — picture a peach or a cherry — with a hard inner layer surrounding a seed (or seeds). That hard inner layer is the stone, or endocarp. Plums and olives are other drupes.

Coconuts come from the coconut palm, which people in white lab coats call *Cocos nucifera*. Coconut palms grow wild in sandy, salty, tropical places — typically on nice, warm, ocean beaches where you'd sure like to be in December.

Coconuts are grown by farmers, too — in Asia, Africa, and Central and South America — because lots of things can be made from them. Mats and ropes from the fibrous mesocarp, or coir ("koyer"), around the stone. Cups and bowls from the shell of the stone. Coconut oil, milk and meat, or copra, from the rich endosperm inside the stone. And so on.

The "coco" part of coconut comes from Spanish ("bogeyman"), from Portuguese ("macaco," or "monkey"), or from both. A coconut stone has three dark marks that look a lot like a face. Of a bogeyman. Or a monkey. Or a bogeyman-monkey.

Nontropically,

Twig



For the week of
Dec. 1, 2002

By Kurt Knebusch
(330) 263-3776
knebusch.1@osu.edu

Hey, Editor!

Juicy, fact-filled coconut tidbits are available at "Fruit and Seed Anatomy, <http://hcs.osu.edu/hcs200/Seed.html> (from Ohio State), "Coconut, Plant of Many Uses," <http://www.botgard.ucla.edu/html/botanytextbooks/economicbotany/Cocos/> (from UCLA), and other fine drupe-related Web sites.

Section of Communications and Technology News and Media Relations

2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

203 Research Services
Building
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3775

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