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Chocolate facts

Did anyone ever say to you

“Don’t eat so much chocolate it doesn’t grow on trees!”

Well you can answer “Yes it does!”



A bit of not so horrible history !

- The chocolate we all enjoy comes from the cocoa plant.
- The plant originates from the Andes, near the Amazon River in South America. The first evidence of cultivation of cocoa plants dates back nearly 2,000 years. The Maya Indians were the first to cultivate the tree and used the beans as a food product but also as currency.
- Money, Money, Money.... you can use chocolate buttons!
- The Aztec Indians had an empire which included the valuable cocoa growing regions. They even charged high taxes in the form of seeds which they called CACAHOATL, hence the word cocoa!
- Cocoa seeds were used as a luxury good or as a drink which they called XOCOLATL from which the word chocolate was derived. But it was not the tasty hot chocolate you get to drink, they added chilli and a natural colouring derived from a herb called annatto to it.
- They believed it had been cocoa was brought to earth by the god Quetzacoatl. They worshipped this god who was thought to be a serpent with lots of feathers. Why don't you try and draw what she looked like- don't make it too scary!
- The Spaniards first introduced cocoa to Europe in 1585. The popularity of chocolate grew quickly across European countries and the demand for cocoa from which it was made increased. However, the climate in Europe was not suitable for growing cocoa plants, so this resulted in the need for more plantations of cocoa plants in South America and to meet growing demand the plant was introduced into the tropical areas of Africa.

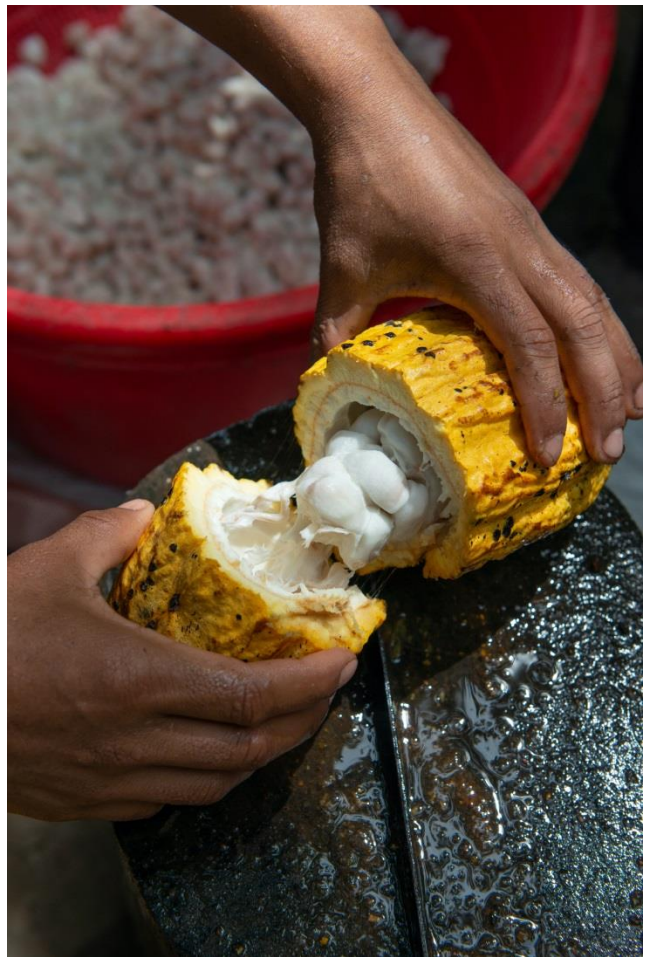
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The flower of a Cocoa tree



Here's an interesting fact about pollination of the cocoa tree. We all know how important bees are in pollinating plants, but believe it or not bees are not involved in the pollination of cocoa plants. Pollination is achieved by insects such as midges, ants, thrips and leaf-hoppers. So, maybe a friendly ant helped make your hot chocolate drink or chocolate ice cream!

Five to six months after pollination and fertilisation the ovary of the flower becomes a pod. When ripe it is cut open to reveal the seeds or cocoa beans!



Don't eat the raw seeds !

- If you come across a cocoa pod don't think if you ate the seeds you would get a massive fix of chocolate – they don't taste of chocolate buttons!
- You would get a very bitter surprise indeed as the seeds have to be fermented (a natural chemical change) and dried. Only then can they be called cocoa beans.
- The white pulp which that you can see surrounding the seeds is very tangy as it contains citric acid – a bit like tasting a lemon – can be bottled as juice or converted into alcohol.
- The beans are made into the chocolate we all know and love. Next time you eat some delicious chocolate amaze your friends and family with some chocolate facts. Enjoy!

