

Carob, for confections without Objections!

Lina Maevis

During my first pregnancy my husband would surprise me with Swiss chocolate.

Then we had a life changing experience before my next pregnancy and from then on, I never ate chocolate again. Which is just as well, since I have since found out that a lot of chocolate originates from cocoa fields on the Ivory Coast that are worked by child slaves. (<http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2012/01/19/child-slavery-and-chocolate-all-too-easy-to-find/>)

Now this did not mean that I totally suppressed my sweet tooth. Not at all. When I was a child my mother occasionally gave us carob pods to munch on. So I already knew that carob was yummy. And fortunately at the time Europe (a brand name, not the geographical designation of a landmass) made a carob block that was very good. So during my 2nd pregnancy my husband made sure I had a regular supply of these. These have gone out of production long ago.

During subsequent pregnancies I indulged in Carob Vitasoy which is also no longer produced. But its ok. I don't need to be pregnant to indulge in carob treats and now I make my own! I was able to source 25 kg sacks of carob powder from a wholesaler and would buy these as needed. They came from Spain and the powder was dark brown. And I made my own carob 'chocolate' for all of us.

Then in 2010 my daughter called me one day and told me that organic carob was now produced in Australia. As it did not come in 25 kg sacks like the imported product, we bought three, 5 kg bags instead and soon learnt that we had found the tastiest carob powder ever.

This delicious Australian carob is grown in South Australia by Michael Jolley and his wife.

Michael had been a gardener and had been keeping his eye out for something less back breaking to earn a living from. He was actually working for a man that had a carob orchard with a number of different varieties. This introduced carob to Michael. Michael observed that the different carob varieties had their own unique flavours in much the way that apple varieties do. After that Michael was on a mission to grow the best tasting carob he could.

In 2000 he purchased 76 acres of nothing and started planting grafted trees purchased from a nursery at Broken Hill. These were 30 cm tall baby trees that had been grown to order for Michael. After a year the trees were staked and pruned for future machine harvesting. They needed to have a straight trunk so that a shaker could be put on them.

Michael has been able to grow his carob organically unlike his European counterparts. The only pest he has had to worry about has been the carob moth and to control it, he has big bug zappers around his orchard. This has been very effective in keeping the moth out of his carob pods.

Carob trees are evergreen, meaning they do not shed leaves in winter. The trees flower from March to the end of May. They come in male, female and bisexual. Michael grows mainly the bisexual and he grows the males for windbreaks. The trees will grow in any soil but its the climate that determines quality. Carob prefers the Mediterranean type of climate with dry hot summers. It does not do well in humidity as pods can go mouldy. Michael waters his trees once or twice a week in summer only when it is very hot. Carob trees can make a good hedge as they can be shaped.

Michael's carob gets processed on farm. When pods are ripe they come off in the hand very easily. After harvest the pods are taken to the on farm shed where they are washed and then milled for a raw powder or carefully roasted for a roasted carob powder. Some of the pods get kibbled. Carob kibbles are a healthy treat for children and are also good to add for a chewy extra to home made muesli.

The great thing about carob it is naturally sweet, unlike cocoa, and does not need the addition of sugar. It is also free of caffeine, and methylxanthines in general. Methylxanthines are cellular toxins associated with chromosome damage and some diseases are made worse by these.

(<http://imlivingsimply.blogspot.com.au/2010/10/lets-look-at-chocolate.html>)

And the really good thing about Michael's carob is that because it is fully product of Australian it is grown to Australian hygiene standards. (Go to the above link and read about the contaminants permitted in cocoa). Another superb thing about Michael's carob is that because it is only used for his own carob it is guaranteed to be gluten free.

The other great thing about carob is that is very good for health. I have given it to my goats to stop scours. It was one of the easiest meds to administer! It is very good for digestive issues being a bowel conditioner! It is also supposed to regulate blood sugar levels. Carob is a very good source of calcium, B1, B2 Niacin and Vitamin A besides also containing Potassium, Phosphorous, Magnesium, Silicon and Iron. It is naturally low in fat. In fact when you treat yourself to carob, you can eat it without any guilt! John the Baptist of New Testament fame, ate carob to sustain himself in the wilderness. For this reason carob is alternatively known as St John's bread. (Very tasty bread!!!).

Carob can be sprinkled on cereal or yoghurt. It can be used for hot drinks. It can be used in cakes, biscuits, slices, pies and my children's favourite, carob balls. You can use carob powder in any recipe that calls for cocoa but you will need to reduce sugar as carob is already sweet unlike cocoa which is naturally bitter. In Europe roasted carob is added to bread.

I have also found that carob powder keeps really well. I like to stir it into cold dairy free milk.

To make your own dairy free carob chips

¾ cup roasted carob powder

¼ cup of rapidura

1 cup of coconut oil

1 tspn caro or ecco (or any brand cereal coffee)

Place all ingredients in a saucepan which is placed over a pot of water.

The bottom pot is on a heat source (hotplate).

Warm until melted.

Spread on some baking paper.

Chill. When hardened, remove from the paper and break into chips.

These can be used as you would choc chips.

Carob balls

1 cup carob

½ cup honey

½ cup nut butter (I always use tahini)

capful of vanilla (for peppermint flavour a drop or 2 of peppermint oil can be used)

1 cup of chopped nuts – I like to use almonds or walnuts

2 tbspsn coconut oil (may need to be melted)

If the mixture is too wet, add more ground nuts. If too dry add a little more coconut oil.

Mix all ingredients together. Shape into balls. Roll in desiccated coconut. Chill in freezer. Serve when

hard. Gobble with pleasure.

To grow your own carob tree from seed, Michael says scratch the seed with concrete or sandpaper lightly. Then soak the seed overnight in water. It should swell up and then it is ready to plant. You may end up with a male tree but even though it will not produce carob pods, it will be a gorgeous tree. You save yourself about 2 years buying a grafted tree from a nursery. Carob trees are slow growing and they do grow large. Once your tree is producing, if you get too many pods, livestock adore them. Or more likely, you will carefully store all your precious pods for your own use throughout the year for healthy treats. And you don't have to be pregnant to treat yourself to carob!