

Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) is a small (4–8 m tall) evergreen tree in the family Sterculiaceae (alternatively Malvaceae), native to tropical Mexico, but now cultivated throughout the tropics. Its seeds are used to make cocoa and chocolate.

It is usually cultivated on large estates under the shade of taller trees. It reaches a height of about 16 feet, has brown bark, light wood, bright green leaves, and small reddish flowers with little scent. Cacao seeds are encapsulated in a yellowy red fruit (Pod), each fruit bearing about 25 seeds. They are 1 inch long, reddish-brown outside and dark brown inside and, when ripe, they rattle in their fruit capsule. Like orange trees, cacao trees bear fruit year-round, but harvesting occurs mainly in June and December. Ripe seeds are released from their capsule, then either sun dried outside, or steam dried in a drying shed.

Cacao Beans are the basic ingredient for chocolate. Cacao is the new-old healthy snack. New, because the nutritive value of cacao is being promoted once again. Old, because for thousands of years civilizations from South America to the Far East have used Cacao for its antiseptic, diuretic and soothing properties. Cacao beans are the seed of the fruit of an Amazonian tree which grows throughout Central and South America. Cacao beans are the source for all Chocolate and Cocoa products. Our certified organic, raw Cacao is the premium Criollo variety. *Theobroma* literally means "Food of the Gods" - so called from the goodness of the seeds and Mexicans named the pounded seeds "Chocolate". The Cacao beans were so cherished by Aztecs and Mayans that it was often used as currency.

Today organic, raw Cacao is used by premium Chocolate makers and is gaining in popularity as nutritious raw superfood. Cacao is incredibly rich in Magnesium and is most likely the number 1 source for this essential mineral. Other essential minerals present in Cacao are Calcium, Zinc, Iron, Copper, Sulfur, Magnesium and Potassium. The bean also contains more antioxidant flavonoids than any other food tested - including blueberries, red wine and green tea. In fact studies have shown Cacao to have over twice as many antioxidants as red wine and three times as much as green tea. The Cacao tree grows in tropical regions around the globe and has been cultivated in Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Central America, West Indies, Africa and South East Asia. It is usually cultivated on large estates under the shade of taller trees. It reaches a height of about 16 feet, has brown bark, light wood, bright green leaves, and small reddish flowers with little scent. Cacao seeds are encapsulated in a yellowy red fruit (Pod), each fruit bearing about 25 seeds. They are 1 inch long, reddish-brown outside and dark brown inside and, when ripe, they rattle in their fruit capsule. Like orange trees, cacao trees bear fruit year-round, but harvesting occurs mainly in June and December. Ripe seeds are released from their capsule, then either sun dried outside, or steam dried in a drying shed.

Cacao has always been highly valued, its seeds sometimes serving as currency as they did during the Aztec period in Mexico. Often called "food of the gods," cacao contains many chemicals that enhance physical and mental well-being, including alkaloids, proteins, magnesium, beta-carotene, leucine, linoleic acid, lipase, lysine, and some neurotransmitters such as dopamine and anandamide which is the so-called "bliss" chemical associated with the feeling of being in love. It also contains theobromine which is similar to caffeine in its effect.

Historically, Cacao has been used as an antiseptic to treat burns, bites, wounds and skin and eye infections; as an emollient to sooth skin irritations, and as a diuretic to treat swelling and water retention. Today, its rich fat content is used to produce cocoa butter which can be both a food, as in chocolate, and a cosmetic, as it is in the many cocoa butter skin creams currently on the market. And now, Cacao is increasingly being consumed for its nutritive and health-enhancing properties, as it has been in many cultures for thousands of years.