Cocoa “Chocolate” Tree (*Theobroma cacao*)

**Origin**

The cocoa tree also known as cacao or chocolate tree is a small tropical evergreen, which originated in the tropical region of South America along the Andes.

**Food Production**

Cocoa comes from the cacao bean, which is found inside the fruit or pod (picture, top left, courtesy of http://thestoryofchocolate.com/index.cfm).

**Nutritional Qualities**

Theobromine is a stimulant found in cacao that is thought by some to help with depression. The fatty acids in cacao may assist in raising good cholesterol and lowering bad cholesterol. Raw cacao may reduce risk of cancer. The leaves of the cacao (picture, top right) have been used in traditional medicine.

**Famous Dishes**

The seeds of the fruit are referred to as beans. These beans are what we use to make chocolate. Cacao beans can be eaten raw, roasted, or made into your favorite chocolate dessert.