



Exploring **coffee** alternatives

Rachel Albert-Matesz

Reduce your consumption of the addictive brew with tasty herbal substitutes.

What would you do for a cup of coffee? According to food historian Martin Elkort, author of *The Secret Life of Food* (Putnam, 1991), “Sultan Selim I of Persia had his doctors hanged when they had the temerity to suggest he give up his daily cup.” You probably wouldn’t go so far, though you may feel like Joseph Cotten—from the Hitchcock movie *Shadow of a Doubt*—whose famous line was, “I can’t face the world in the morning. I must have coffee before I can speak.” If so, you’re not alone.

Half of all American adults start their mornings with at least one cup of coffee, down from 74.7 percent in 1962. How many people does this amount to? “Today, nearly 100 million American adults drink three or more cups of coffee each day,” says researcher and clinical nutritionist Stephen Cherniske, author of *Caffeine Blues* (Warner, 1998), a look at America’s number-one addiction.

Cherniske catalogs evidence linking the cumulative adverse effects of caffeine (particularly coffee) consumption to a host of health problems: asthma, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, anemia, calcium loss, osteoporosis, PMS, fibrocystic breast disease, fertility and conception disorders, complications of pregnancy and childbirth, diabetes, glaucoma, digestive disorders, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, tension headaches, migraines, high blood pressure, heart disease, and certain cancers.

Caffeine dependence

Do you suffer from caffeine dependence syndrome? If you experience three out of the four following symptoms, then it’s likely that the answer is yes, say researchers at John’s Hopkins University in Baltimore:

- Withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches, depression, and fatigue
- Continued consumption of caffeine despite physical problems
- Unsuccessful attempts to cut back on or eliminate caffeine consumption
- Tolerance (you need or can tolerate increasingly large intakes)

What can you do? Well, you have a few choices. You can keep doing what you’re doing, or you can taper down, dilute your coffee, switch to decaf, or banish the beany brew altogether.

The dilution solution

Consider substituting half of your ground coffee with a brewable coffee alternative, such as roasted dandelion or chicory root. Chicory (*Cichorium* spp.) is native to Europe—particularly popular in France, Belgium, and Holland, where its leaves are used as a salad vegetable—and was naturalized in North America. Chicory bears heads of large, bright-blue flowers with dandelion-like roots. When roasted, the roots make a wonderful caffeine-free coffee extender or solo substitute. Chicory root contains lactucin and lactucopicrin, compounds with a mildly sedating effect on the central nervous system. In the Deep South, roasted chicory has been blended with coffee for decades to make the popular French Market Coffee.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is second only to chicory as a coffee substitute.

Most folks regard dandelion as an invading weed of golden flowers, jagged toothed leaves, and finger-thick roots that delve deeply into lawns. Unfortunately, the common yard variety of dandelion yields roots that are difficult to harvest and are too small to be economical for use as root “coffee.”

For this

The best brewable caffeine-free coffee alternatives

- Roasted chicory root
- Roasted dandelion root
- Roasted barley (also called *mugi-cha*; sold in Asian markets, macrobiotic supply catalogs, and some health-food stores)
- Raja’s Cup (grinds for brewing)
- Teecino Caffeine-Free Herbal Coffee (available in Original, Java, Almond, and Amaretto)

reason, larger-rooted varieties of dandelion are usually grown for medicinal and culinary uses.

Both chicory and dandelion root have been used throughout history (dating back to the time of Egyptian pharaohs) as a liver detoxifier and a natural remedy for arthritis, diabetes, elevated cholesterol levels, constipation, and more. Researchers have identified substances in these bitter roots that increase the flow of bile, necessary for proper liver function and metabolism of fat and

What about organic coffee?

Don't want to banish the brew? Then go organic and work on reducing the amount of coffee you drink. Organic coffee is grown, harvested, and processed without synthetic chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers), which have been linked to cancer and other health problems. Organic growers must meet stringent standards and have their products certified by an independent third party.

Look for "shade grown" coffee. This type is cultivated under a canopy of native shade trees, home to a complex ecosystem, including half of the plant and animal species (migratory birds, insects, and more) on the planet. This approach supports the soil and land while providing low-income third world farmers with alternative cash and food crops in addition to coffee, giving them a chance to break the cycle of poverty and farm their land sustainably. According to the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, as many as 150 different bird species have been sighted and documented in shaded coffee farms, compared to only five to twenty species in unshaded coffee farms.

As for cost, organic coffee ranges from \$10 to \$14 per pound. The good news is this: One pound of coffee makes about thirty to forty cups, so even if you pay \$12 a pound for organic, you'll still only be paying \$.30 to \$.40 per cup of coffee.

The following are sources for organic coffees.

Kalani Organic Coffee (shade grown);
www.kalanicoffee.com

Equal Exchange Fairly Traded Organic Coffee
(shade grown); www.equalexchange.com

Cafe Altura (biodynamically grown);
www.cafealtura.com

Rapunzel Pure Organic Coffee (shade grown);
www.rapunzel.com

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters (shade grown,
fairly traded); www.greenmountaincoffee.com

Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company (organic,
fairly traded); www.santacruzcoffee.com

Caffe Ibis (shade grown, organic, fairly traded);
www.caffeibis.com

cholesterol. Herbalists have used them to aid in reducing PMS symptoms. By improving liver function, the roots help the liver eliminate excess estrogens that would otherwise build up in the body, causing hormone imbalances.

The decaf solution

Coffee can inhibit iron absorption by as much as 50 percent. Decaffeinated coffee has less caffeine, but it still contains polyphenols, a family of substances that bind with iron and excrete the mineral along with the urine. If you use decaf, select a product made by the Swiss Water Method, rather than with methylene chloride, a chemical solvent that causes liver cancer in laboratory mice.

The no-caf solutions

For several decades, consumers have had access to "instant grain beverages" made from roasted wheat, rye, barley, and chicory root powder, with the optional addition of acorns, figs, or beetroot. The instant crystals dissolve readily in hot or cold water and often taste similar, but not identical to, coffee—if you use two or three rather than one teaspoon per cup of water. Be open to experimentation. You may take a liking to these beverages within a few days or weeks.

Instant grain products include Caffix, Pero, Caf-Lib, Lima's Yannoh, Bioforce's Bambu, Natural Touch's Kaffree Roma, Post's Postum, Oskri's Barley Coffee, and Dr. Christopher's Express Aroma. If these don't do the trick, consider tea alternatives such as Celestial Seasonings' Roastaroma (which includes roasted barley, roasted chicory, roasted carob, and cinnamon) or Maharishi Ayurveda's Raja's Cup, an antioxidant-rich coffee substitute made from Ayurvedic herbs. Vary the steeping time and add-ins (milk, milk substitute, or sweeteners) as you like.

If you value the deep, rich flavor and enticing aroma of coffee as much as the ritual of brewing, "herbal coffees" are well worth trying. They look, taste, and are brewed like coffee—in an automatic drip coffeemaker, electric or stovetop percolator, French press, or espresso maker. Common ingredients include roasted chicory and/or dandelion root, with or without roasted carob, barley, almonds, or figs.

My favorite buy

I'm not a coffee lover, never have been. As a child, I sipped my mom's coffee with cream and sugar but never developed the coffee habit. (And I love mornings!) As an adult, I have choked down black coffee under duress on a couple of long, snowy cross-country drives, agreeing with my driving companion that I'd rather have coffee than an accident. I tried coffee as a pre-aerobic stimulant and fat-burning aid, then gave it up. I liked the buzz, but it wasn't worth the lost sleep or adrenal exhaustion I incurred.

For years, I've enjoyed the hearty, robust flavor and fragrance of roasted barley, dandelion, and chicory roots and successfully served them to guests. I buy the "grinds" from the bulk herb and spice section of health-food stores, although you can also order them by mail or over the Internet from Frontier Herbs (www.frontierherb.com) and Alvita (www.alvita.com).

Of the instant alternatives, Kaffree Roma and Yannoh were my favorites for many years. In recent years, I've sampled and enjoyed Roastaroma and Raja's Cup.

Cooking with coffee alternatives

When cooking, baking, or making blender drinks, use instant grain beverage powders as you'd use instant coffee. Blend the powder with water, juice, milk or milk substitutes, or use a strong-brewed beverage as a stand-in for coffee or other liquids in your favorite pudding, ice cream, smoothie, cake, or iced mocha recipe.

BASIC PROCEDURE: ROASTED CHICORY "COFFEE"

Makes 6 cups

When roasted and brewed, chicory and dandelion roots have a robust coffee-like flavor and aroma. Unlike coffee, they're caffeine-free. You can make a pot, refrigerate the leftovers, then reheat as needed. A strong brew may be used to make a Mocha Frosty, pudding, custard, or ice cream. Make it strong or weak, as you like.

*4 to 6 tablespoons roasted chicory root or roasted chicory root grinds
6 cups filtered water*

In a saucepan: Spoon roasted roots or coffee-like grinds into an oversized tea ball. Place the tea ball in a 3-quart glass, ceramic, or stainless-steel pot with the water. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes or until dark. If it's too strong, add a bit more water.

In a percolator: Add the roasted chicory or dandelion root to the metal basket of a stainless-steel stovetop percolator (with or without an unbleached paper liner) and cook as above. Or, use an electric percolator, following the manufacturer's suggestions.

Drip coffee maker: Line the basket with a coffee filter. Add roasted chicory or dandelion root, then water, and follow manufacturer's instructions.

Serve hot by itself or with organic milk, cream, unsweetened coconut milk, or almond milk. Sweeten with honey, agave nectar (cactus honey), or stevia. Reheat as needed, or pour into one or more thermos bottles and seal to keep warm for several hours. When the pot runs low, add more water and 50 percent more roasted roots, then cook again. Or, toss out the grinds and start over. Refrigerate the unused coffee in a glass jar. Reheat on top of the stove. Use within 4 days.

Variations

- Roasted Dandelion Coffee: Replace chicory with roasted dandelion root.
- Roasted Chicory and Dandelion Coffee: Use a 50:50 ratio of roasted dandelion to chicory root. Or, use 4 parts chicory and 2 parts roasted dandelion root.

BETTER-BALANCED MOCHA FROSTY

Makes one 16-ounce serving

This high-protein, low-carb, dairy-, sugar-, and caffeine-free concoction makes a perfect blood-sugar-balancing snack or mini-meal. Brew the roasted root "coffee," then freeze it in an ice cube tray for 6 to 8 hours or several days in advance. If the protein powder you use is sweetened, reduce or omit the herbal sweeteners below. I buy plain gelatin in bulk in a health-food store; feel free to substitute unflavored gelatin.

1 cup strong Chicory and Dandelion Coffee (recipe on page XX)

1/3 cup boiling water

2 teaspoons unflavored gelatin

2 teaspoons apple fiber powder

1½ to 2 tablespoons roasted almond butter or hazelnut butter

1 ounce vanilla protein powder

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon stevia extract powder or kiwi concentrate

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon or cardamom, optional

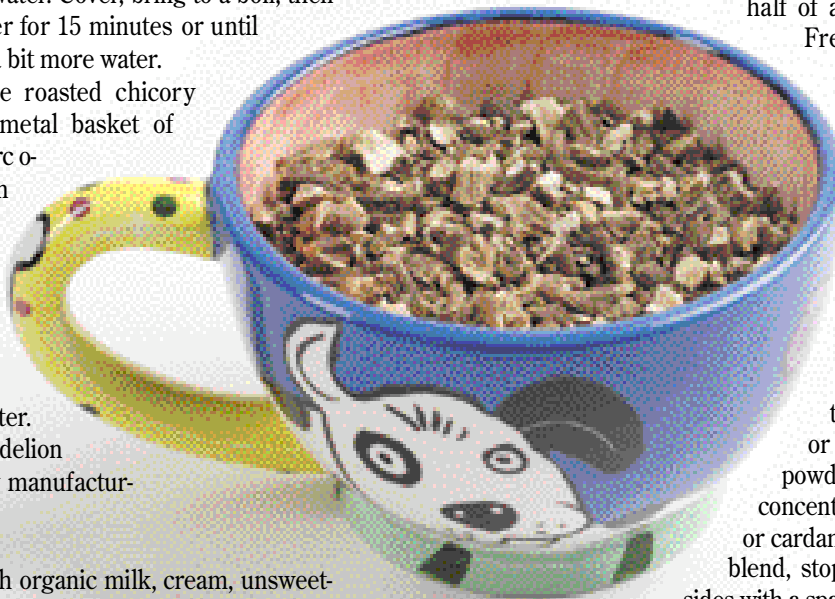
1 or 2 plain ice cubes, optional

Pour the Chicory and Dandelion Coffee into half of a standard ice cube tray. Freeze until hard. This may be done several days or weeks in advance.

Add the boiling water to the blender. Cover and turn on low, holding down the top with a kitchen towel. Sprinkle the gelatin through the top feeder, blend for 30 seconds, then turn off. Add the apple fiber, almond or hazelnut butter, protein powder, vanilla, stevia or kiwi concentrate, and cinnamon or cardamom, if desired. Cover and blend, stopping to scrape down the sides with a spatula.

With the motor running (in ice-crushing mode), add 4 "coffee" ice cubes through the top feeder; blend; add 3 or 4 more cubes, stopping periodically to scrape down the sides with the spatula and push the ice to the bottom of the blender. Add plain ice cubes as desired; add a dash more sweetener if you'd like.

Pour into a tall glass and serve immediately. For a thicker texture, chill for 5 to 10 minutes before serving. ❄️



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