

What is Cascara? Coffee, Tea, Superfood?

After walking into a coffee shop in Washington D.C. recently, I was quite surprised that they were promoting a new drink for 2017 on the menu called “Cascara”, with a subtitle stating “Warm and nutty caramel tones made from the skin of coffee cherry blossoms”. I asked the barista if this was tea or coffee. She looked perplexed and said to me, “no, it’s a syrup”. Needless to say I was confused, but intrigued. So I thought to myself, a new drink being showcased at this coffee shop which could seem to be a healthier alternative to coffee, yet it’s syrup. This is the brilliance of marketing, which makes you excited about something new being available as a coffee alternative. I proceeded not to order it because I didn’t fully understand what they were offering. Was it tea, coffee, syrup, or all of it mixed together? Either way, if I was to order Cascara, I would want the real super food coffee cherry tea version I heard of, not a syrup mixed into a hot drink. My visit to this coffee shop left me wondering, what is this elusive Cascara being offered, and is it really coffee or tea?



After further research, I found that Cascara (translated from Spanish meaning ‘husk’ or ‘peel’) is also known as coffee cherry skins in English. Cascara must not be confused with the herbal plant with a similar first name, Cascara Sagrada (Chittam Bark), which is completely different and has natural laxative properties when consumed. Cascara (coffee cherry skin) is the by-product of the coffee beans after they have been removed from their red skins and dried in the sun, much like raisins. In the past, these skins were usually placed in compost or thrown away during harvest because it was believed to ruin the

taste of coffee. However, for centuries Cascara has been brewed in Yemen and Ethiopia before coffee beans were even used as a drink. Recently, this alternative sounding exotic drink has made a big move onto the U.S. market in various forms including everything from beauty products, tea infusions, enhanced waters, sports drinks, sodas, to vodka infusions and other alcoholic beverages.

What still remained unclear was how should this elusive and somewhat confusing drink be classified? It is believed that Cascara is something between coffee and tea, although it is derived from the coffee plant. It should be noted that Cascara does not taste like coffee nor does it contain its high caffeine content. According to Moldvaer, "Cascara caffeine content is fairly low, even at the strongest, longest brew, the caffeine content of Cascara came in at 111.4 mg/L, compared to broad range of about 400-800 mg/L in brewed coffee." Cascara comes in an interesting mélange of flavors ranging from sweet, subtle, earthy, to rich, warm, robust and nutty. Its undertones have a fruity flavor with hints of raspberry, red mulberry, currant, cranberry, and cherry.[2] Its classification is neither coffee nor tea, but it remains in its own realm because it does not come from beans or tea leaves, but from the fruit of the coffee plant. However, there is an opposing opinion suggesting that it is indeed coffee with high caffeine content. According to Megan Wood, "cascara is a tropical, berry fruit that just happens to be coffee," Wood says, "It's not tea – it's 100 percent coffee. But it smells like herbal tea." She also goes on to say that "It's kind of like nature's Red Bull." So at the end of the day, you might have to make the decision yourself whether you want to categorize cascara as tea, coffee, or a hybrid, and whether it leaves you feeling caffeinated or not.

Regardless of its disputable classification, I would recommend you be courageous and jump on the trendy drink bandwagon for 2017 and give Cascara and its healing benefits a try. Even

though you may not know whether it's truly coffee or tea, the health benefits are numerous. Due to its high concentration of polyphenols, Cascara is a true superfood. It will also help boost your immune system, provide antioxidants thus protecting you from free radicals, and offer you a host of anti-inflammatory properties. With extensive research over a decade, FutureCeuticals, has also discovered that Cascara produces BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor), a protein essential for maintaining healthy cognition, and other brain-related processes such as mood and sleep.

Cascara can be consumed as a hot drink or as a cold refreshing infusion. According to 44 North Coffee, Cascara is loaded with flavor, vitamins, natural sugars, and anti-oxidants. Dr. Debbie Palmer states that, "Cascara is rejuvenating because it's high in polyphenol compounds: proanthocyanidins, chlorogenic acid, quinic acid, ferulic acid and caffeic acid. The coffee berry fruit has been found to be higher in antioxidants than tea, vitamin C and E, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, and pomegranate." In preparing Cascara, Wood and Raftery recommend steeping three tablespoons of cascara in 10 ounces of hot water for four minutes. For a cold brew, they suggest six tablespoons to 12 ounces of water, steeped for 12 to 16 hours. To purchase Cascara, there are a number of coffee roasters making it available online. Let this year be the year where you become an independent taste tester, and you can make your own personal decision on whether Cascara is coffee, tea, or something in between. Either way, it's a highly recommended alternative as a superfood drink option. For a great recipe on making a cold brew of Cascara (Coffee Cherry) tea, visit Alma Holistic Health.

Interesting fact: In Yemen, Cascara is consumed as Qishr (a hot beverage containing spiced coffee husks, with ginger and cinnamon) which is usually consumed instead of coffee because it is much cheaper.

Recommended Reading:

- *Three Homemade Toothpaste Recipes – Better Oral Health for Less Cost*
- *Inexpensive, Easy Detox – The One Gallon Challenge*
- *How to Optimize Curcumin Absorption – With Golden Milk Tea Recipe*
- *Cherries – The Superfood You Should Know About*

Sources:

- *What is Cascara? – Fresh Cup Magazine*
- *What Does a Coffee Cherry Taste Like? – Stack Exchange*
- *Cascara ‘Tea’: A Tasty Infusion Made From Coffee Waste – NPR*
- *Discover Coffee Fruit, Nature’s Wasted Superfood – Paste Magazine*
- *Cascara ‘Tea’: A Tasty Infusion Made From Coffee Waste – NPR*