

Special Report

Get to Know Your Fruits And Veggies From A-B

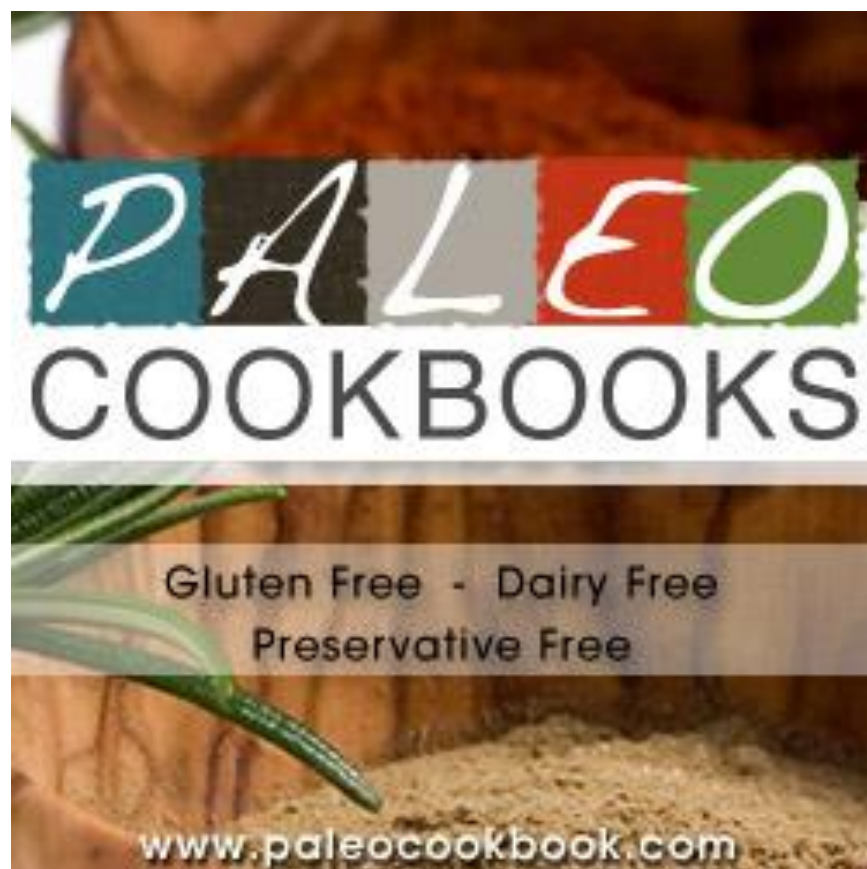


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Unravel The Mysteries Of The Acai Berry



Acai berry, pronounced [ah-SIGH-ee] is probably one of the most highly disputed fruits of the current day. Let's take a deeper dive into this amazing little fruit and find out exactly where it came from, some possible health benefits, and a few ways to incorporate this fruit into your diet.

What is it?

Acai berry is a small reddish, purple fruit, resembling a stretched out grape. These berries are found on the Brazilian wild palmberry tree, native to Central and South America. There have been numerous studies done on the health benefits of these berries, but a majority of them have been focused on the antioxidant activity which could help prevent certain diseases.

History

Acai has been around for thousands of years, but was not introduced to the western world until the mid 1990's. First used by the tribes of the Amazon jungle as a cure for various ailments, acai berries soon made a home in the Americas. It didn't take long for westerners to believe in the tremendous health properties credited to this tasty fruit.

Where Does it Come From?

The açaí berries can be found on a palm tree with a long thin trunk. The berries would be grouped in clusters that look like little blue bottles hanging in between ribbon-like leaves. Traditionally, the acai

berries would have to be picked by hand. The tribe's men would shimmy up the tree and cut the branches from the top of a palm tree laden with acai berries. The harvest would then be brought back to the women of the village to pluck and prepare.

Health Benefits

The health benefits are where most of the debate on acai is concerned. Some studies show there are no greater health benefits from eating acai berries than similar fruits, berries, and vegetables. However, other studies claim to prove the antioxidant levels are much higher. Even if acai berries are only on an equal footing with other fresh produce in providing a defense against free radicals, they would be worth considering when eating a healthy diet.

Acai contains powerful antioxidants called anthocyanins and flavonoids. These two antioxidants help defend the body against life's stressors. They also play a role in defending the body against free radicals. Free radicals are harmful byproducts either introduced to the body as toxins from the outside environment or produced by the body from the remnants of processed foods and other internal pollutants. By lessening the destructive power of free radicals, antioxidants may help reduce the risk of some diseases, such as heart disease and cancer.

Fun Fact

Anthocyanin is Greek for 'blue flower.' These antioxidants are what give the acai berries and juice the reddish, purple, and blue hues. Many fruits which contain these deep, rich pigments, like blueberries, blackberries, and cranberries, are extremely high in antioxidant properties.

How to Eat

Acai berries can be consumed in a number of different ways. Some people prefer them raw as acai na tigela - literally translated as 'acai in a bowl'. Others prefer to drink the sweet juice, sometimes as part of a smoothie. Straight up, acai juice is similar to drinking grape juice.

Acai berries are a great addition to salads, especially when combined with slivers of toasted almonds and crumbles of soft goat cheese. Due to the natural pH of the juice, acai is also great at tenderizing meat and makes an excellent marinade for beef and lamb. Another trend emerging from the acai world is wine made from the berries. The list will grow as more and more people find out about this fabulous super food.

No matter how you get your acai fix, you will enjoy the new flavor profile on your palate and the added antioxidants in your diet won't hurt either. So pick up some frozen berries or a bottle of juice and make this fun-to-pronounce berry a part of your daily diet.

There's More To An Apple Than Meets The Eye



If you haven't spent a lot of time in the apple growing regions, you may not know how versatile this fruit is. Apples come in all sorts of shapes, colors, and tastes; not just the two or three you may know from your local grocery store's bagged produce department. Apples grow in just about every corner of the globe. Apples can be used in a variety of dishes from appetizers to main dishes to desserts. Let's get down to the core and see where apples come from and how they earned their rightful place in almost every aspect of our dietary lives.

What is it?

Apples are the fruit borne from, well, apple trees, of course. They come in various shades of red, yellow, and green and most have a white flesh that varies in texture from crisp to soft. Spanning the taste spectrum from sugary sweet to pucker-up tart, apples are one of the more versatile foods in the marketplace.

History

Apples have been around in one form or another for over 4,000 years. They were first brought to the United States in the early 1600's by explorers and settlers. Apples were highly valued and became a staple food in most households because they stored well fresh and were easily dried, then became the star of the home-canning world. Today, apples are still treated the same way – with appreciation for their versatility in recipes, ease of storage, and variety of preservation methods. For these reasons, apples are enjoyed by thousands around the globe.

Health Benefits

Apples have proven to be beneficial in every health aspect from bone protection to alzheimer's prevention, and even diabetes management and cancer prevention. The reason apples are linked to all of these health benefits is because of the two integral layers – the skin and the pulp – both being an excellent source of vitamin C, just to name the most obvious and well known nutrient. Along with the added nutrients, the things that are missing from apples also make them noteworthy under the 'health benefits' tag; namely, apples are fat free, sodium free, and cholesterol free.

Pectin in the meaty part of the apple helps manage diabetes by supplying galacturonic acid which lowers the body's need for insulin. Phloridzin, a flavanoid found only in apples, may help protect menopausal women from the frightening occurrence of osteoporosis. A nutrient found in apple skins, boron, has been found to strengthen bones.

Fun Facts

Apple trees can live for many years; sometimes well over a century. There are more than 7,500 varieties of apples grown in the world and about 2,500 of those are grown in the United States. Red Delicious is the most popular and well-known apple in the USA, with Golden Delicious following behind in a close second. Granny Smith apples are fast approaching these two powerhouse apples in popularity. The

average American eats more than 70 apples a year, and considering apples are free of fat, salt, and cholesterol, as well as being a good source of dietary fiber and vitamin C, it's no wonder our doctors are trying to get us to eat one a day.

How to Eat Raw Apples

Eating a raw apple is as simple as diving teeth-first through the crisp skin right into the sweet or tart insides, and letting the juice run down your chin. If you wish to give your teeth a more gentle approach, and keep a neater smile, you can also core and cut the apple into wedges. Once you have these juicy little wedges, you'll be looking for goodies to dip them into. You don't have to look much further than peanut butter for a classic snack.

Apples can be diced and added to a fruit salad, tossed into a crunchy tuna salad with celery, or dipped in chocolate and caramel and topped with nuts. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of ways to eat a raw apple. If you are lucky enough to be around an apple orchard, then there is nothing like picking a ripe apple from a tree, still warm from the sun, and enjoying each bite right in the shade of the branches of the apple tree.

How to Eat Cooked Apples

You can get as fancy as you want or as down-home simple as can be with apples. From apple pie to apple crisp and apple pastries to apple omelets, cooked apples are a favorite food around the world. Looking for something simpler than a pie? Just simmer the apples until they get soft, throw in a little sugar and cinnamon, and mash them into, you guessed it, applesauce. Eat it as it is or serve over ice cream.

What if you don't have a sweet tooth? Apples are often found in side dishes with cabbage, collard greens, spinach, or other savory vegetables. You will find a delightful mix of flavors when you add apples to a skillet full of harvest vegetables, onions, and a splash of balsamic vinaigrette. And, don't forget to try your hand at an apple glaze for your next pork tenderloin. Think beyond apple pie and you'll discover a whole world of recipes for your next bag of apples.

No matter how you decide to eat your apples, just remember the old adage, 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away.' Now we have the scientific studies showing all the nutrients there are in apples, so there's no excuse not to add this versatile fruit to your diet. Of course, that cool, crisp crunch of an apple alone should convince you to take a bite!

Get To Know The Fuzzy Little Apricot

Apricots are soft, sweet, juicy, and mostly recognized for their fuzzy skin. This little orange colored fruit is packed with nutrients and great for snacking. Once you get past the giant plum-like seed casing in the middle, every bite is a delight. Let's take a look at this fuzzy little fruit and see where it came from and a few other interesting facts.

What is it?

The apricot is the fruit produced on a rather scrawny looking tree. The tree canopy spreads out like thin arms, producing a massive amount of fruit. The actual apricot is similar in size to a small peach. The orange color may appear the shade of a basketball, and will often be darker orange or even red on the side more exposed to the sun. The single seed is enclosed in a hard pit often called a 'stone.' If you look at the pit, you will see three ridges running down one side, which is where the new plant breaks through once it sprouts.



History

Apricots have been cultivated in Armenia since ancient times and it is thought to be native to the area. However, other studies and excavations of ancient sites have shown that apricots have been farmed in both ancient China and India almost 1,000 years prior to the Armenians. You'll find apricot groves in warm climates in the United States, even growing wild. The wild versions are still edible, though quite a bit smaller. If you live in a warm region, you may experience your first wild apricot sighting when you spot squirrels running around with small 'basketballs' in their mouth.

Health Benefits

Full of beta-carotene, giving them their orange color, and packed with fiber, apricots are a great addition to any diet. Apricot kernels contain between 2% and 2.5% hydrocyanic acid (cyanide), which, contrary to popular belief, is not enough to be harmful if consumed. The seed also contains high levels of cyanogenic glycosides which can help treat cancer and was used to treat tumors in the early 5th century. In more recent years, studies have shown that treating prostate cancers with the amygdalin found in apricot seeds may induce reduction in cancer cells.

If you are looking for heart healthy fruit, apricots are your best friend. Compared to other foods, apricots possess the highest levels of carotenoids which can help prevent heart disease and even lower bad cholesterol levels. While these are great benefits to have, other studies have shown that apricots are best when consumed in moderation and excess intake could actually be harmful to your body. As in most consumption, heed the advice "do all things in moderation."

Fun Facts

Apricots are in the same family as plums. The full species and subgenus is *Prunus armeniaca*, which, when translated is "Armenian Prune." Apricots are susceptible to bacterial and fungal diseases. One of

the biggest enemies of the apricot tree is the nematode, which is why the valuable seed is grown inside the pit to make sure a new generation of apricot survives in the wild. A little lesson in nature protecting itself.

Because their natural sugars help preserve the fruit, much like honey and dried dates found in the ancient Egyptian tombs, dried apricots can last for several centuries without spoiling. The kernels of the apricot grown in some regions are so sweet they may be a substitute for almonds. Amaretto liqueur and amaretti biscotti, two Italian favorites, are often flavored with apricot extract rather than almonds to save on costs.

How to Eat

Snacking on dried apricots is a great way to add a sweet treat to your day; anytime anywhere. Throw a handful in with your cereal, or top a crisp salad with dried apricots to add an extra flavor profile to your dish. Kids especially like the surprisingly fuzzy little texture of dried apricots, along with the super sweet taste. For an extra treat, dip dried apricots in a bit of melted chocolate.

Fresh apricots can be reduced in a sauce to be used as a glaze for pecan crusted chicken. Create a simple apricot sauce to accompany grilled pork. Dice up fresh apricot for a luau inspired salad. You can even halve apricots and grill them, just like you would peaches or pineapples. Consider mashing apricots to add to pan breads for a completely different spin on baking.

No matter how you use them, apricots are a delicious and healthy way to add some sweetness to your meals, without picking up the sugar bowl. Buy some today and try to incorporate them into your daily diet. You will feel good knowing you are boosting your nutrition level with every sweet bite.

Spring Into Asparagus For Super Flavor And Nutrition



To know asparagus is to love asparagus, once you learn the right preparation. Asparagus is in many regions the first sign of springtime fresh eating. If you have only tried canned asparagus, you'll want to take the time to learn about fresh asparagus and give this amazing vegetable a try. Let's take a look at this super-green springtime miracle and how to enjoy it.

What is it?

Asparagus grows naturally as a perennial plant in Europe (mostly Spain, Ireland, and Germany) and the United States. The leaves are actually the spear shaped stalks that, in a traditional leaf, would be the stem running down the middle. Early in the growing season, the tender asparagus spike is small and slender without buds or berries. That's when they are perfect for plucking.

The asparagus plant usually produces yellowish or white bell-shaped flowers and small red berries once the plant has matured into a hard, woody plant, not suitable for eating. As a matter of fact, the berries are poisonous.

History

Asparagus had an early start in the medicinal field due to its diuretic properties. You can actually find a recipe for cooking asparagus in the oldest known cookbook, Apicius' *De re coquinaria*, Volume III. Asparagus was originally cultivated by the Egyptians. Later the Greeks and Romans ate fresh asparagus during the warm spring and summer months and dried it to use in soups during the colder winter months. In the Middle Ages, asparagus lost its popularity, returned later in the seventeenth century and has become a popular vegetable in today's culinary environment.

Health Benefits

If you are looking for a low calorie, nutrient rich vegetable, asparagus is the answer. Asparagus is a great source of B vitamins, calcium, magnesium, and zinc. With high amounts of dietary fiber found in the outer stalk and elevated levels of folic acid, iron and vitamins E and K, asparagus is also a great food for pregnant women or nursing mothers as these are nutrients your baby needs to develop and stay healthy.

Fun Facts

Asparagus was once classified in the lily family like its cousins onion and garlic, but has since been moved into the flowering plant family, named Asparagaceae.

The green variety of asparagus is eaten worldwide, though the availability of imports throughout the year has made it less of a delicacy than it once was. In the UK, due to the short growing season and demand for local produce, asparagus commands a premium and the summer season is looked forward to all year long.

In northern Europe, there is a strong following for white asparagus which is local to the region,

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