

Sprouting made simple

By Bobbi Gustafson



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Want to try something different with your beans and grains? Sprout them before eating them.

Many gardeners and health-conscious folks like to sprout their bean and/or grain seeds before eating them. Why? Let us count the ways.

- Sprouts are packed with enzymes, vitamins and minerals.
- Sprouted beans, for example, are more digestible than unsprouted beans. This translates to, well, less gas.
- Sprouts have lower cholesterol than seeds, and between 4 and 10 times the nutritional value.

Surprised by that last one? Don't be. Seeds are dormant and, although they're still nutritious, the enzyme inhibitors that keep a seed dormant also keep that seed's full nutritive potential under lock and key. Soaking a seed in water shuts down that inhibitor. The seed then unleashes a rapid flush of growth, morphing it into living food packed with nutrition.

Take a sprouted mung bean, for example. Add water to one and you'll decrease total carbohydrates by 15 percent, increase vitamin B1 by 285 percent, increase riboflavin by 208 percent, increase vitamin B2 by 515 percent, increase vitamin B3 by 256 percent, and increase vitamin C by . . . well, that one's off the charts.

You can reap the benefits of these little dynamos by adding sprouts to rice dishes, casseroles and soups in the last 20 minutes for extra boost in nutrition. They are good in omelets, salads, biscuits and bread. Some people sprout their grains, dry the sprouts and grind them into flour, changing the composition of the grain to a vegetable and creating a food that's easier for people with digestion problems to process.

Getting started

There are many gadgets you can buy for sprouting, but if you have an empty jar and a lid that fits, that will do. You can also cut a piece of plastic window screen for draining jars and a rubber band to secure it, although this approach isn't absolutely necessary.

Start by making sure your container is clean. Then choose seeds that have been processed for food consumption. (The natural food section of your grocery store is a safe place to buy sprouting seed.)

If you can, use filtered water, because the chlorine and fluoride that can be found in municipal water systems will adversely affect plants. Chlorine will dissipate if you leave the water container uncovered, but fluoride will not. If you do not have filtered water, however, don't let that stop you. Any sprouts are better than no sprouts.

Place 1 part seeds to 3 parts water and soak for 12 hours (overnight is about right). Some seeds, like grasses, take less time. Some, like beans, take more. Beans should be started in 90- to 100-degree water.

After the initial soaking, drain the jar, fill it with fresh water and drain it again until the water stops dripping. Leave the cap on this time, but very loose. So that air and humidity levels are balanced. Shake the seeds lightly to get a little air in, then tip the jar on its side on a towel, in a bowl or on a counter or cookie sheet. For the best taste (eventually), rinse the sprouts twice a day.

In three or four days, you should be able to eat your sprouts. You can eat sprouts when they have only a small root or you can let them develop leaves. They'll keep in your refrigerator for up to 6 weeks.

You know, for the kids

Sprouts make fun treats for kids, too. Try this:

Take a small bowl of alfalfa sprouts, a side dish of ranch or Caesar dip, and carrot and celery sticks. Dip the veggie sticks in the dip and then into the sprouts. Kids like to dip their foods—especially if they have grown the sprouts themselves. Another snack is whole grain or nut crackers with peanut butter or almond butter spread on them. Press them face down into alfalfa sprouts and the sprouts will stick to the crackers. Then put a grape, raisins or a hazelnut in the middle so it looks like a bird's nest.

Sprouting choices

Ready to get sprouting? There are many seeds from which to choose. Some of my favorites are mung beans, alfalfa, French lentils, peas, broccoli and radish. Rye has a very pleasant taste sprouted.

A note about buckwheat: Grow (and eat) it only at the root stage. When buckwheat reaches its grass stage, it develops a chemical called fagopyrin, which causes skin irritation and sensitivity to light. There is no such reaction in its root stage.

Whatever seeds you choose to sprout, you're guaranteed a real bang for your buck.



photo by **Bobbi Gustafson**

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REFERENCES:

- J. Robert Nuss, professor of horticulture at the College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State University

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