

Edamame



Edamame (eh-dah-MAH-may), the green soybean that is used fresh, rather than dried, has been a staple of Asian diets for thousands of years and is now gaining popularity around the globe. Edamame, which means "branched bean" in Japanese, is the same species as field soybeans, *Glycine max*, but it has a larger seed, sweeter flavor, smoother texture and better digestibility. In China, you would ask for the beans that grow on plants with fuzzy leaves, stems, and pods as mao dou, which means "hairy bean."

Edamame is rich in protein, fiber, calcium and vitamins A and B. A one-half cup serving of these great tasting soybeans will contribute 11 grams of protein (about 25% of your daily requirement), 130 mg calcium (about as much as one-half cup of milk), 15% to 20% of your daily requirement of iron, 485 mg potassium, and 25% of your daily requirement of the B-vitamin folate. Additionally, edamame is rich in phytoestrogens, which help increase good cholesterol, lower bad cholesterol, promote prostate health, and act generally as an antioxidant.

Did we mention that edamame is quick and easy to cook and tastes delicious? After removing the bean pods from the plant and washing them, cook them (pod and all) in boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes. Drain the beans and let them cool for a few minutes. Remove the beans and compost the pods. Shelling edamame is a lot like shelling lima beans. For a simple vegetable dish, toss the cooked shelled beans with a little olive oil and a sprinkle of salt. Add them to salads, toss them in a stir-fry, or use them in soups like any other bean. For a fun snack, boil the pods in salted water, and then squeeze the beans from the pod right into your mouth. A common dish to have with your beer in Japan is a bowl of boiled edamame. You'll never want pretzels again!

If something is this good it must be hard to grow, right? Wrong – edamame is easy to grow in the Pacific Northwest. The optimum soil pH for edamame is 6.0, which is about where your garden soil should be for other vegetables. Edamame seeds are sensitive to soil conditions. Wait until your soil temperature is 65°F, May to mid-June, depending on your specific location. Your soil must drain well as edamame seeds will rot easily in heavy wet soil. Do not overwater while the seeds are germinating, but do keep the soil from drying out completely since edamame sprouts are not vigorous enough to push through heavily crusted soil. Edamame plants grow as sturdy bushes and do not require staking or trellising.

Harvest edamame when the pods begin to plump and the beans almost touch within the pod, about 85 days after planting. Pods should be bright green, similar to snow peas. If the pods have started to yellow, you have waited too long. The beans will be starchy and will not be as sweet. All pods on the plant are harvested at the same time so plant in succession to have fresh beans over a longer period of time.

Edamame is susceptible to the same diseases as most bush beans, but with a little care these are easily prevented. Avoid wetting the foliage to prevent powdery mildew. Rotate your crops to avoid soil-borne diseases and the depletion of specific soil nutrients. Potential pests include cucumber beetles, bean weevils, and Mexican bean beetle. Inspect your plants often and prevent any of these pests from getting out of control. Slugs and birds love the tender shoots as they emerge from the ground. Bait for slugs and use a row cover to protect the young plants from birds. If you live in deer country, don't even think about planting edamame anywhere except inside a tall sturdy fence.

If you hurry, there is still time to find some edamame seed for this year's garden! Try these sources: Evergreen Seeds, <http://www.evergreenseeds.com/evergreenseeds/vegetableseeds.html> , (8 varieties) Territorial Seed Company, www.territorialseed.com (4 varieties), Seed Savers Exchange, www.seedsavers.org (3 varieties), and Johnny's Selected Seeds, www.johnnyseeds.com (2 varieties)."

Resources

[Edamame](#), Alleman, G.P., Miles, C., Zenz, L. Edamame. Retrieved March 14, 2006 from WSU Vancouver Research and Extension Unit Web site.

[Edamame](#) , Miles, C.A., Lumpkin, T.A., Zenz, L. . PNW0525. Retrieved March 14, 2006 from WSU Publications Web site.

Solomon, Steve. *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades*. Seattle, Washington: Sasquatch Books, 1989.