

# Special Report

## Get to Know Your Fruits and Veggies from A-B

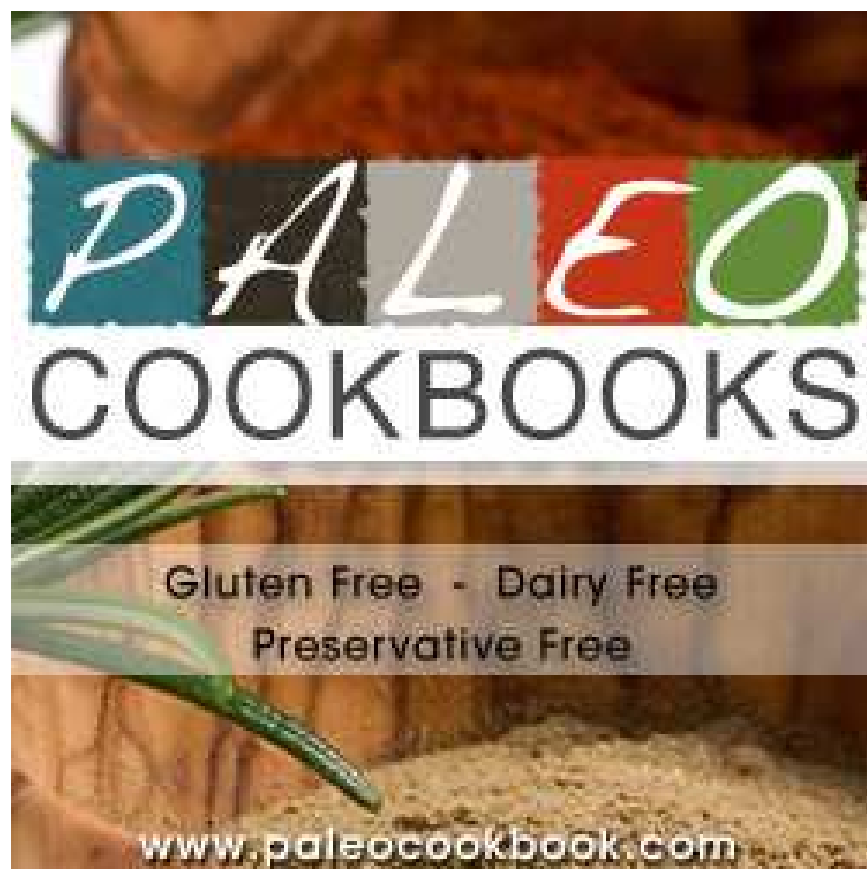


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## Unravel The Mysteries Of The Acai Berry



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 5<sup>th</sup> 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,

nicknamed 'white gold.' Asparagus was so highly demanded in the Eastern world that France's Louis XIV had special greenhouses built solely for growing it.

In the northern climates in the United States, spring is anxiously awaited for many reasons, including the asparagus that starts peeking through the ground as soon as the snow melts and the soil warms. Wild asparagus, or 'roadside asparagus' is a welcome sight, making many a motorist stop and pick fresh asparagus to their heart's content.

### **How to eat**

Asparagus spears are served in a number of ways. A typical preparation would be as an appetizer or side dish. In Asian cooking, asparagus is often added to stir-fry and served with chicken, shrimp, or beef. In the United States, asparagus is often eaten wrapped in bacon or quickly grilled over charcoal. Many cultures use asparagus to flavor soups or served steamed with a light hollandaise sauce. You'll find asparagus, lightly cooked and bright green in color, diced and tossed in a variety of pasta dishes, hot or cold.

An easy way to cook asparagus without over cooking it, which would leave it bitter and limp, is to roast it on a baking sheet tossed with olive oil and salt. Quickly blanching the asparagus in a basket dropped into a deep pot of boiling water, then cooling in an ice bath, is another way to maintain the color, flavor, and crisp-tender texture perfect for asparagus. Asparagus is usually not eaten raw, but is often flash-cooked to maintain the crunch of raw with the flavor of cooked.

When choosing your asparagus bunch from the grocery store, look for firm, small, dark green shoots with tightly bunched heads. This will ensure you get the freshest batch. The bottom portion of the asparagus may be woody and covered in sand and dirt. Wash the asparagus thoroughly, then give the stem a quick snap; the stalk will bend and break where it is tender, so just throw out the bottoms that snap off.

Pick up any recipe book and chances are you will find at least a few amazing recipes with asparagus in the supporting, or starring, role. Give asparagus a try in a new recipe and see for yourself why people have been raving about asparagus for centuries.

## Get To Know The Avocado – The Fruit That Wants To Be A Vegetable

The term 'good fat' may seem strange, but nutritionists know the facts; our body needs it to function properly. One source of this 'good fat' is avocados. Avocados are a staple food for many reasons in many different cultures. Let's learn about this smooth, creamy fruit... or is it a vegetable?

### What is it?

First of all, the avocado is a fruit, even though it may taste like a vegetable. The avocado or 'alligator pear' refers to the fruit of the avocado tree. Avocados may be pear-shaped, egg-shaped, or spherical. Strange as it seems, the avocado is actually a large berry containing a large seed.

Avocados are an economically and nutritionally valuable fruit cultivated in tropical climates throughout the world.

As anyone who has ever bought an avocado knows, the avocado is often pretty firm, even hard, when you buy it. Then, in a few days on your countertop, it gets softer. That is because avocados ripen after harvesting, when the fruit begins releasing a chemical similar to that of a banana.

### History

Originally found in Puebla, Mexico, the avocado we see in stores in the United States is quite different from the avocado found in other regions. The oldest avocado found dates back to almost 10,000 BC. It was found in a cave in Coxcatlan, Mexico where Puebla is today. To promote the propagation of avocados around the world, the plant was introduced to the Indonesian culture in the mid 1700's, Brazil in the early 1800's, Levant in the 1900's, and South Africa and Australia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Health Benefits

Avocados provide nearly twenty essential nutrients, including fiber, potassium, Vitamin E, B-vitamins, and folic acid. They also act as a 'nutrient booster' by enabling the body to absorb more fat-soluble nutrients, like beta-carotene and lutein. The avocado has a higher 'good fat' content than most other fruits. This is the reason avocados serve as an important staple in the diet where access to other foods that supply good fats, like lean meats, fish, and dairy, may be limited.

The American Heart Association (AHA) Dietary Guidelines recommend a diet that has at least five servings of fruits and vegetables, contains up to 30% of calories from fats (primarily unsaturated) and is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, trans fats, and sodium while being rich in potassium. Avocados are a nutrient dense food that can help you meet these AHA dietary guidelines.

A generous helping of avocado on a regular basis has all sorts of health benefits, including those little things we love like shiny strong hair and nails, and younger looking and feeling skin. Of course, there are those big things, too, like lowering cholesterol.



## Fun Facts

Avocados were known by the Aztecs as 'the fertility fruit' because of its supposed aphrodisiac qualities. In Nahuatl avocado is called *ahuacatl* and is found compounded with other words, as in *ahuacamolli*, meaning avocado soup or sauce, from which the word guacamole is derived. It is also known as Butter Fruit in parts of India due to its butter-like texture.

The average avocado tree produces about 1,200 avocados annually. Commercial orchards produce, on average, seven tons per hectare (about 2.5 acres) each year with some orchards reaching upwards of 20 tons per hectare.

## How to eat

To tell if an avocado is ripe, hold it in the palm of your hand and squeeze gently. It should yield to a gentle pressure. A ripe avocado is easy to peel if you cut down lengthwise and twist the avocado slightly to split it in half. The pit can be popped out by inserting the blade of a knife into the pit and giving a nudge. Then, use the knife tip to slice through the flesh of the avocado, but not the outside peel, in sections and turn the nubby peeling inside-out and the ripe flesh will pop out.

The flesh of an avocado is prone to enzymatic browning, meaning it turns brown quickly after exposure to air. To prevent this, lemon juice or lime juice can be sprinkled on the avocado after the peeling is removed. Not only does the citrus juice slow the browning process, but it compliments the flavor of the avocado. In fact, avocado dishes often call for the addition of fresh lime or lemon juice.

Generally, avocado is served raw because many varieties cannot be cooked without turning bitter. However, there are a few dishes that call for brief heating in the oven just until the avocado is warmed through. Some of the more popular uses of avocado is in guacamole or other types of salsas, atop a bright green salad, or even on hamburgers and sandwiches. Avocados are found in many varieties of sushi, too.

Due to the high fat content, many countries blend the avocado with other fruits and vegetables to make smoothie-like drinks. You may also find avocados used as an additive or filler for ice cream since the flavor profile is extremely subtle, the texture is creamy, and the flesh of the avocado can take on just about any flavor you subject it to.

Whether you are trying avocados for the first time, or are a big fan already, you may be surprised just how much of a super-food avocados are. Besides being healthy, avocados are a delicious treat. Give avocados a try today and find out how easy it is to incorporate this powerhouse fruit into your diet.

## Discover The Bountiful Goodness Of Breadfruit

This popular Malayan fruit can be roasted, baked, or fried. It tastes like bread and can be substituted for starchy ingredients like rice. What else can this strange-named fruit do? Let's find out.

### What is it?

Breadfruit is a type of flowering tree closely related to the mulberry family. Breadfruit is one of the highest-yielding food plants, with a single tree producing upwards of 200 or more fruits per season. In the South Pacific, the trees yield 50 to 150 fruits per year, however, in southern India, normal production is 150 to 200 fruits annually.



### History

The ancestors of the Polynesians found the trees growing in the northwest New Guinea area around 3500 years ago. They gave up the rice cultivation they had brought with them from ancient Taiwan, and raised breadfruit wherever they went in the Pacific. Breadfruit then spread west and north through Southeast Asia.

Sir Joseph Banks and others saw the value of breadfruit as a highly productive food in 1769. As President of The Royal Society, Banks offered fame and fortune to anyone who could successfully introduce the breadfruit crop to Britain. William Bligh was appointed to the task, and after surviving a mutiny on the first trip, a second expedition was successful in returning with hundreds of live breadfruit plants.

### Health Benefits

Breadfruit holds a treasure chest of nutrition, most notably being rich in fiber. This fiber can help control diabetes and even lower bad cholesterol levels, decreasing the risk for heart attacks. It is currently recommended that adults consume 20 to 35 grams of dietary fiber per day, which is equivalent to two cups of boiled breadfruit. Consider replacing white rice in meals with breadfruit to boost your dietary fiber easily. Breadfruit can also provide a proportion of the recommended requirements for vitamin C, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, phosphorus, and iron.

### Fun Fact

The wood of the breadfruit tree was one of the most valuable timbers in the construction of traditional houses and furniture in Samoan architecture. Although the wood is not very hard, it is strong, pliable, and termite resistant. The lightness of the breadfruit tree wood makes it perfect for making surfboards. The wood is also used to make traditional Hawaiian drums.

### How to eat

Breadfruit can be eaten once cooked, or can be further processed into a variety of other foods. A common preparation, at least outside the United States, is to take fermented breadfruit and combine it with coconut milk and baked in banana leaves. This is similar to a rice pudding in texture and taste. Whole fruits can be cooked in an open fire, then cored and filled with other foods such as coconut milk, sugar and butter, cooked meats, or other fruits. The filled fruit can be further cooked so that the flavor of

the filling permeates the flesh of the breadfruit.

If you get a chance to try breadfruit, you will not be disappointed. Not only is this amazing fruit extremely tasty, it is also highly filling. So, don't let your eyes get bigger than your stomach; be sure to share this tasty treat with your friends.

# Enjoy A Bunch Of Benefits Eating The Humble Banana



In terms of global sales, no other fruit tops bananas. This curved tropical fruit is loved the world over, but there are some interesting facts you may not know about this highly popular, and delicious, fruit.

## What is it?

Banana is the common name for a number of different fruits around the world. What we think of as bananas is not necessarily the same as many other cultures. Bananas come in a variety of sizes and colors when ripe, including yellow, purple, and even shades of red. A visitor from the tropics to the United States might not even recognize those little yellow bunches in the grocery store.

## History

Native to tropical South and Southeast Asia, and likely to have been first domesticated in Papua New Guinea, bananas are cultivated today throughout the tropic regions of the world. They are grown in at least 107 countries, and are harvested primarily for their fruit, and to a lesser extent to make wine and decorative plants.

Recent findings suggest that banana cultivation goes back to at least 5000 BC in the Asian regions and possibly even to 8000 BC. It is likely

that other species were independently domesticated at later times elsewhere in Southeast Asia and finally into Africa.

## Health Benefits

Bananas are a good source of vitamin B6, vitamin C, manganese, potassium, and iron. One new catch phrase, probiotic “friendly” bacteria, is old hat to the banana; this fruit has been “friendly” to our digestive systems long before we heard the term. Along with other fruits and vegetables, consumption of bananas may be associated with a reduced risk of a variety of cancers, including colorectal cancer and breast cancer.

Some studies have found that banana ingestion may increase the 'feel good' chemicals, dopamine and serotonin, in the brain. Other studies have shown positive results using bananas in the diet to treat jaundice and kidney stones. Many people who workout or play sports know the benefits of eating a banana after their workout is over. Bananas help prevent lactic acid from building up in the body after we quit exercising, preventing sore muscles. You can't go wrong with the humble banana when it comes to eating healthy.

## Fun Facts

The word 'banana' usually refers to the soft, sweet dessert variety. By contrast, other countries grow and eat bananas with a firmer, starchier fruit, called plantains or cooking bananas. The terms 'plantain' and 'banana' in these countries are widely interchangeable which means you need to be careful when asking for a banana – you never know which one you might get.

The banana plant is a very large flowering plant and is often mistaken for trees. Their main 'trunk' is

actually a pseudo-stem that grows almost 25 feet tall. Each pseudo-stem can produce a single bunch of bananas, which actually grow point up rather than hanging down, making them look upside-down.

Bananas are slightly radioactive due to their high potassium content with a naturally occurring isotope, potassium-40. Proponents of nuclear power sometimes refer to the 'banana equivalent dose' of radiation to support their arguments for safe nuclear power.

### **How to eat**

If you can peel it, you can eat it. Every culture has numerous ways to eat bananas, from deep frying, baking in their skin, or even steaming with rice. Banana pancakes are a favorite of hikers along the Southeast Asian trails. When dehydrated, banana chips make for a great snack and can even be used as special treats to train dogs.

Bananas may be relegated to snack time or dessert time in many households, but try thinking outside that pie pan. Bananas can perk up a spinach salad with vinaigrette dressing like nobody's business. Grilled bananas can add a very interesting flavor and aroma as a side dish with grilled pork. Of course, you'll want to keep a bunch hanging around for your morning smoothie. There are countless ways to enjoy bananas daily.

Grab a bunch of bananas and begin to experiment with different recipes. Not only do bananas taste great, they offer a whole bunch, pun intended, of nutrients. Any time you feel tired, run down, exhausted after a workout, grab this easy snack and you'll feel better fast.

## Stop Feeling Bushed With A Healthy Dose Of Blueberries

Feeling bushed, exhausted, all in? Pop a handful of blueberries in your mouth and enjoy a little energy boost, along with a mother-lode of nutrients. For such a small fruit, blueberries pack a wallop! Let's take a look at this North American favorite and learn more about this beautiful, and versatile, fruit.

### What is it?

The actual fruit is a tiny round berry with a flare at the end resembling a crown. The color pallet of blueberries as they mature ranges from pale green to reddish-purple, and finally deep purplish-blue when ready to be picked and eaten. Blueberries characteristically have a whitish-gray powdery or waxy 'bloom' that covers the surface as a protective coating. When ripe, blueberries have a sweet taste and a juicy inside. Blueberries usually hit the peak of their season, depending on the region, sometime between May and October.

### History

Blueberries are generally found in North America, Europe, and Asia with many native species residing in the United States. Many North American native species of blueberries are now also commercially grown in the Southern Hemisphere in Australia, New Zealand, and South American countries.

Several other plants of the same family also produce commonly eaten blue-colored berries such as the predominantly European bilberry, which, in many languages, has a name that means 'blueberry' in English.

### Health Benefits

Especially in wild species, similar to its cousin acai berry, blueberries contain anthocyanins and other pigments high in antioxidant properties possibly having a role in reducing risks of inflammatory diseases and certain cancers. Technically speaking, blueberries contain pterostilbene, anthocyanins, proanthocyanidins, and resveratrol, all which inhibit the cell development of cancers. Nutritionally speaking, blueberries are a good source of vitamin C, manganese, dietary fiber, and vitamin E, and are low in calories, so you can enjoy a bucketful without guilt.

Many studies have found that blueberry consumption lowers cholesterol and total blood lipid levels, possibly reducing the risks of heart disease and high blood pressure. Even more studies have found that a diet rich in blueberries may enhance short-term memory in older adults while reducing symptoms of depression.

### Fun Facts

There are two types of blueberry bushes; lowbush and highbush. The difference is the lowbush blueberries are considered wild, while highbush blueberries are cultivated in a controlled environment.



With upwards of 25% production of all lowbush blueberries in North America, Maine is the single largest producer in the world with more than 60,000 acres. Not far from Maine, Michigan is the world's largest producer of highbush blueberries, with more than 220,000 tons produced a year.

Since blueberries must be cross-pollinated, upwards of 50,000 beehives may be needed for the job. Due to the large amount of bees needed, in some cases hives must actually be shipped in from other regions specifically for the purpose of cross-pollinating the blueberries in high producing areas.

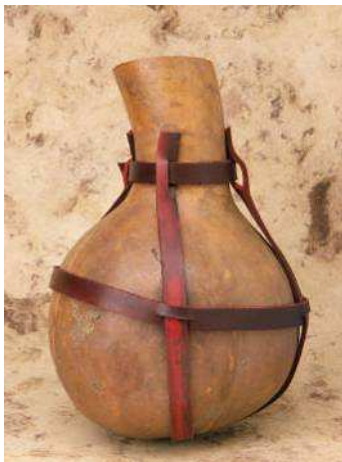
### **How to eat**

Blueberries are a lot of fun to eat. They pop when you bite them and turn everything they touch into a reddish-purple hue. This color change makes pancakes, yogurt, cereal, smoothies, and even ice cream a fun new territory for children. Blueberries are found in many breads and desserts, but also make great jams, jellies, and wines.

Fresh blueberries keep very well and can be packaged and stored easily. Freezing fresh blueberries is a cinch; just put them on a baking sheet in a single layer and pop them in the freezer. They will freeze quickly, and once they are frozen, just pour them into a plastic freezer container. Then when you want blueberries, just shake out the amount you want and let them thaw out. Perfect every time. Because blueberries are so moist, they don't dehydrate well, like bananas or apples do. For that reason, you do not find too many applications for dried blueberries, unless you rehydrate them for a dish first.

No matter how you decide to eat your blueberries, you can't beat the nutritional value. If picking wild blueberries, don't forget to be polite to the landowner and ask permission. Or, plant a few blueberry bushes in your own garden. Invite the bees in and you'll soon have your own blueberry crop to enjoy. Just a reminder: It's not easy to get away with pilfering blueberries – you are likely to get caught 'reddish-purple' handed!

## Double Duty Fun With The Delicious And Crafty Bottle Gourd



Not familiar with a bottle gourd? How about it's other names – calabash, ope squash, lauki, or long melon? Let's take a look at what makes up this oddly named veggie.

### What is it?

The bottle gourd is grown on a vine, similar to a pumpkin, and can be harvested early in the year as a food, or much later as a utensil. Yes, once matured, the inside of this squash becomes tough and loses its flavor, so the only thing left to do is hollow out the vessel and use the mature, dried casing as a bottle, utensil, or pipe.

### History

A commonly known cultivated plant, bottle gourds are usually found in tropical and subtropical areas. Their origins are believed to be from Africa, around the Zimbabwe region, while other experts claim Asia should be listed as the country of origin. The bottle gourds which are found in these regions, growing wild, generally have a thinner wall and would not do well in shipment, but are still easily molded into utensils by the experienced tribes. Present-day bottle gourds owe their thick, waterproof wall to the experts who domesticated this versatile plant.

### Health Benefits

Cooked bottle gourd, or lauki, is a calming, soothing food that acts as a diuretic. Extremely low in calories and high in dietary fiber, cooked bottle gourd makes an excellent food for people who are dieting. After eating a healthy portion of cooked lauki, your stomach is full and your whole body feels relaxed; and if you're dieting, you will appreciate those feelings. You can enjoy large portions of cooked bottle gourd without worrying about counting calories.

You'll notice I keep saying "cooked bottle gourd." That's because you don't want to eat the vegetable raw as it could harm the stomach and digestive system, causing ulcers, or worse. Like other members of the gourd family, the bottle gourd contains the tetracyclic triterpenoid cucurbitacins compound, which is responsible for the bitter taste. This bitter taste should let people know that it is poisonous, but raw 'calabash juice' has been touted by weight loss hucksters as a miracle drink. Just be aware that drinking raw, uncooked 'calabash juice' or eating raw bottle gourd is dangerous to your health. Once cooked, the bottle gourd becomes harmless and quite tasty, offering more than enough health benefits to keep anyone on a weight loss program happy.

### Fun Facts

The bottle gourd was one of the first cultivated plants in the world, grown not for food but as a container. It was primarily used as utensils, such as cups, bowls, and basins, mostly in rural areas. It can be used for carrying water, or can be made for carrying items, such as fish, dirt, or other food. In some Caribbean countries it is worked, painted, and decorated as shoulder bags or other items by artisans, and sold to tourists. You are probably most familiar with it as a highly decorated bird nest, often hung from large poles.

In Jamaica there is also a reference to the natural lifestyle of Rastafarians using the gourd to make a rattle of sorts for musical festivities. As a cup, bowl, or even water-pipe, the bottle gourd is considered

consistent with the 'Ital' or natural lifestyle of not using refined products such as table salt, or using modern cooking methods, such as microwaves. In Haiti the plant is called 'kalbas kouran' literally meaning "running calabash", and is used to make the sacred rattle emblematic of the Vodou priesthood, called an "asson". The bottle gourd plant is highly respected in many areas, so much so that the bottle gourd happens to be the national tree of St. Lucia.

### **How to eat**

The calabash, as a vegetable, is frequently used in Asian cuisine as either a stir-fry or in a soup. In Burma, young leaves are also boiled and eaten with spicy hot fermented fish sauce called Nga peet. And in Central America seeds of the bottle gourd are toasted and ground with other ingredients (including rice, cinnamon, and allspice) to make horchata, a popular drink of the region.

In other cultures, this gourd is cooked just like a summer squash and enjoyed with a variety of toppings including butter and brown sugar. Often connected with Indian cooking and spices, the bottle gourd is very typically surrounded with warm, spicy aromas.

If you have never tried bottle gourd, today just might be your lucky day. See if any specialized grocery stores in your area offer this delicacy. Then, after you are done with it, you get to have a craft project to play with. Decorate the outside skin, then use it for a bird feeder in your own back yard. How about that? Dinner and entertainment all wrapped up in one thick-walled gourd.

# Eating Is Believing When It Comes To The Benefits Of Broccoli

Broccoli is a plant in the cabbage family, whose large flower head is what we know as this familiar vegetable, often found on a vegetable snack tray at parties right close to the Ranch dressing. But, broccoli has so much more to offer. That's why broccoli is a favorite vegetable worldwide. Let's take a look at this flowering veggie that looks like a tiny tree. You might just be surprised at where it was first discovered.



## What is it?

The word broccoli stems (pun intended) from the Italian plural of broccolo which means "the flowering top of a cabbage." Broccoli has large flower heads, usually green in color, resembling a tree with branches sprouting from a thick edible stalk, or stem. Broccoli most closely resembles cauliflower, which is a different variety from the same species. The cooking aroma of broccoli is most often referred to as 'cabbage like.'

## History

The broccoli we know and love today evolved from a wild cabbage plant somewhere in Europe. That solves the 'cabbage like' aroma mystery. The earliest documentation of the small green, edible tree was discovered to be about 2,000 years ago. Since the rule of Rome, broccoli has been considered a uniquely valuable food among Italians. Broccoli was first introduced to the United States by Italian immigrants but did not become widely known until the 1920s.

## Health Benefits

Broccoli is high in vitamin C and fiber. It also contains multiple nutrients with potent cancer-fighting nutrients, such as diindolylmethane and small amounts of selenium. A single serving provides more than 30mg of Vitamin C and a half-cup (about the equivalent ingested at any given office party or potluck) provides nearly double that. Broccoli also contains the compound glucoraphanin, which can be processed into the anti-cancer compound sulforaphane.

The benefits of broccoli are believed to be greatly reduced if the vegetable is boiled, but it still remains an excellent source of fiber and other nutrients which boost DNA repairs in cells. Broccoli has one of the highest levels of carotenoids and is particularly rich in lutein and beta-carotene.

A high intake of broccoli has been found to reduce the risk of aggressive prostate cancer and heart disease. A compound found in broccoli appears to have more effectiveness than modern antibiotics against the creation of peptic ulcer causing bacteria. Broccoli is one veggie everyone needs in their diet.

## Fun Facts

The word broccoli comes from the Latin word brachium and the Italian word braccio, which means 'arm.' Broccoli comes in a variety of colors, ranging from deep sage all the way to dark green and purplish-green. The world record for eating broccoli is held by Tom Landers who devoured 1 pound of broccoli in 92 seconds. The tree-like shape makes this healthy veggie a popular fun food for kids. Dip a forest of broccoli trees in Ranch style dressing 'snow' and watch the kids gobble them up like hungry giants.

## How to eat

Broccoli is usually boiled or steamed in the American culture, but has become a popular raw vegetable to accompany creamy dips. Boiling reduces the levels of anti-cancer compounds in broccoli, with losses of 20% to 30% after five minutes, 40% to 50% after ten minutes, and a whopping 77% after thirty minutes. Steaming broccoli for a maximum time of 3 to 4 minutes is recommended to maximize potential anti-cancer compounds.

Adding broccoli to a stir fry dish helps retain a majority of the beneficial properties, rather than letting the nutrients wash away in the boiling water. Another method of cooking that's getting more popular is oven roasting. Simply spread broccoli florets (that's the top cut into tiny bush-like shapes) and diced stem pieces on a baking sheet, coat with cooking oil, and put in oven to roast. You'll have a lightly toasted broccoli dish that's almost nutty in flavor, plus the nutrients didn't get washed down the drain.

You can enjoy raw broccoli in many popular salads, such as the classic Broccoli Raisin Bacon Salad you find at many potlucks. Toss tiny raw broccoli florets in with a big green lettuce salad for a crunchy nutrition boost. Broccoli Slaw is a relatively new idea for serving broccoli. Just peel the stalk to remove all the woody fibers, then cut the light green inside into very thin strips. You can toss these with cabbage and carrots for a slaw, or just eat as is for a snack.

Another popular dish to serve broccoli in a main dish is Chicken Divan. This classic dish features whole broccoli spears underneath a creamy, cheesy layer of chicken. Then, there is the classic Broccoli Cheese Soup. I could go on and on talking about this nutrient-dense delicious veggie and all the tasty dishes you can make with broccoli.

Eat broccoli raw whenever you can for the ultimate health food. When you do cook broccoli, keep your cooking time short if you're steaming it. Better yet, throw it in the oven and roast it. The next time you walk through the produce department, grab a big bunch of broccoli and enjoy the hundreds of ways to eat it up!

## Resources

[Paleo Cookbooks](#) - slimmer, faster, stronger, and healthier. The Paleo Cookbooks are changing people's lives forever. From breakfasts to snacks to dinners and side salads, there are hundreds of Paleo Recipes to choose from. Never get bored at dinnertime again! Find out more at PaleoCookbooks.com

[Your Plate, Your Fate](#) - is your forever guidebook for using food and nutrients to improve your health and vitality, lose weight, slow down the aging process and prevent disease

[EAT CLEANER](#) - Protect and preserve your plate with EAT CLEANER all natural food wash and wipes. Tasteless, odorless, convenient, effective and safe.

[Herbtrader](#) - Over 8,000 organic, natural, and eco-friendly products.

[Glutenfree](#) - your #1 source for everything gluten-free. Over 650 products available!

[Us Wellness Meats](#) - nutritious, delicious grass fed goodness... delivered to your door!

[Vital Choice Wild Seafood & Organics](#) - Vital Choice is a trusted source for fast home delivery of the world's finest wild seafood and organic fare, harvested from healthy, well-managed wild fisheries and farms.

[Food4Wealth](#) - Grow you own eco-organic food. Easy step-by-step instructional book and video to grow all the food you need and more. Anyone in any backyard can do it!