

Incredible Edible Seeds

by Mercedes Picot

Edible seeds are minuscule treasure troves of flavour, mega nutrition, and medicine. They're just too tasty and nutritious to leave them for the birds! Magically encapsulated in the embryo of all seeds is all of the information the future plant will need to achieve its full potential. Nature has provided us with a profusion of varieties of little seeds in an endless quantity for our culinary and medicinal experimentation.

Despite a seed's tiny size, it provides a wealth of concentrated essential elements that can add zest to your cuisine as well as an array of nutritive, antiseptic, and antibiotic substances. They will add texture, colour, and bursts of flavour to many of your favourite recipes. The high quality protein and heart-friendly fats in seeds also means you get a big bang for your buck in terms of satisfying your hunger pangs.

Because of their hard shells or husks and protective pods, seeds do a great job of evading animal predators but have not eluded cooks and doctors since the beginning of time. Over the centuries, man has devised ways of preparing the tiny treasures for both their culinary and medicinal value.

When purchasing, only select seeds which are whole and fresh-smelling. Avoid seeds that have been previously roasted and salted and have added hydrogenated oils. Store seeds in an airtight container in a cool place as they will go rancid over time. Your refrigerator or even your freezer is the best place to store them.

Most seeds can be roasted in a shallow tray in a medium oven or dry-roasted in a pan on top of the stove. Keep your eye on them as they burn easily. They should be ready in about 10 minutes (less for sesame seeds, longer for sunflower seeds).

Here is a brief description of a smattering of seeds To whet your appetite.



Caraway seeds: One of the oldest spices known to man. They have traditionally been used in the manufacture of liqueurs, rye bread and cakes, as well as sauerkraut. The distinctively flavoured seeds are good for digestion and are reputed to prevent flatulence.



Cardamom seeds: The black aromatic seeds found in cardamom pods lend pungency to curries, pilafs, and desserts. Infused into warm drinks such as coffee (3-4 seeds per cup) and traditional Chai tea, cardamom aids digestion and freshens the breath when chewed.



Chia seeds: These tiny seeds are an exceptionally rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. They can be sprinkled on cereal, eaten as a snack, or can be ground and mixed with flour and baked. Once valued so highly by the Aztecs, it was used as currency! It was a staple food also for the Indians of the Southwest and Mexico. A versatile flavourless gel can be made by mixing 9 parts water to 1 part chia - this can be added to hot or cold cereals, yogurt, smoothies, condiments, dressings, and sauces, or as a fat replacer for oil in bread or baked goods recipes. Salba is a registered trademark for a particular organic variety of chia.



Cumin seeds: These fragrant seeds are a favourite of Indian and Mexican cuisine where they are most often ground into a powder after dry-roasting. They are an essential ingredient in Garam Masala, the traditional Indian spice mixture, and have been grown in that country since ancient times. They were also grown in Egypt, Arabia, and the Mediterranean countries and were used in ancient Rome. Today, cumin's distinctive, warm flavour is appreciated by chefs world-wide.



Fennel and Aniseed: Similar in their licorice-like flavour, both can be used to make refreshing digestive teas. Popular in Mexico and the entire Mediterranean; anise is used in Chinese & Indian cuisine to flavour meat dishes. Fennel is used in Italy to spice game and in France to flavour cheeses. They are both used in the manufacture of liqueurs.



Flaxseed: Also called linseed, these nutritious and flavourful seeds come from one of the oldest plants to be cultivated by man. It was grown 4,000 to 5,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Egypt and used for making linen cloth and medicine. The Greeks and Romans enjoyed them as food. Prized for their high content of polyunsaturated fatty acids & Vitamin E. Can be mixed into yogurt or breakfast cereals; added to bread recipes or simply to a glass of fresh juice or water. It is best to grind them in small batches for optimal utilization. Be sure to freeze or refrigerate seeds which have been ground.



Hemp seeds: Shelled hemp seeds (also known as hemp hearts) have a pleasant nutty flavour, similar to sunflower seeds. This tasty nutritional powerhouse is the choice topping for salads, cereal and yogurt. It is also used as an ingredient for nutrition bars and baking as well as a delicious healthy snack right from the bag. They are rich in protein (38%), omega-6 & omega-3 essential fatty acids (EFAs) and dietary fibre.



Pine nuts: These seeds come from various pines, chiefly the Stone Pine of the Mediterranean. They are also known as pignolias or Indian nuts and are an essential delicious ingredient in Pesto & Caponata. These seeds quickly go rancid so buy from a refrigerated source and keep them in the fridge or freezer at home.



Poppy seed: The seeds have been popular with cooks for centuries for their unique flavour and high nutritive value. When heated, they become nutty, with sweet and spicy undertones. Culinary seeds do not contain any of the narcotic alkaloids found in the medicinal varieties. Blue poppy seeds are mainly used for breads, bagels, cakes, and pastries. The white variety is usually used in curries.



Pumpkin seeds: The true giants of the vegetable kingdom, pumpkins are believed to have originated in south Asia. Popularized through pumpkin pie, it's the seeds that contain the true nutrition in the plant. Eaten raw or roasted, the nutty tasting seeds provide a good source of proteins, unsaturated fatty acids, vitamins and minerals. They are extremely rich in zinc, containing as much as 40- 50 parts per million of this essential mineral. Men and teenage boys especially need zinc for its value against prostate inflammation and cancer. So get munching guys but avoid the salted, oily varieties.



Sesame seeds: Of ancient African or Hindu origin, sesame is an important crop in the Middle & Far East as well Mexico. The tiny oval seeds range in colour from white to black. An excellent source of oil with up to 90% polyunsaturated fats as well as several vitamins, minerals and lecithin. They deliver excellent amounts of calcium as does Tahini, a sesame nut-butter. According to Hindu mythology, sesame is a symbol of immortality and the gods of the Assyrians are alleged to have drunk sesame wine to give them the strength to create the world! Delicious in chicken, fish, vegetable or rice dishes.



Sunflower seeds: The Spanish conquistadors came to the New World in search of treasure but didn't think much of the tiny treasures they brought back to Spain in 1504. And so the little black seed from the golden sunflower made its way to Europe. The Peruvian Indians revered the sunflower because of its resemblance to the sun, their god. The seeds are rich in B-Vitamins as well as many nutrients not usually found in plants such as iron, copper, zinc, and other minerals. They contain up to 50% of mostly poly-unsaturated fats. Loaded with vitamin E, they may help protect against Alzheimer's disease. Their pleasant taste and low caloric value make for excellent snacks, tasty pâtés and nutritious nut butters.