

The science of why bamboo shoots are a superfood

While bamboo consumption might be closely associated with pandas, many cuisines across Asian cultures, including India and China, consider bamboo shoots a culinary staple.

Now, a [recent review of scientific research](#) suggests that bamboo shoots should be elevated to superfood status because of the slew of health benefits they offer. Here's what to know.

(The science of why chia seeds are a superfood.)

The health perks of bamboo shoots

The research revealed that consuming bamboo shoots is associated with better blood sugar regulation, as well as improvements in bowel function and lipid profiles, which could reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. In addition, the review found that consumption of these young sprouts is tied to an increase in antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity and lower cell toxicity in the body.

It also established that antioxidants in bamboo shoots can protect against the effects of acrylamide and glycidamide, harmful compounds that are formed in starchy foods, like potatoes and bread, during high-temperature cooking, explains study coauthor [Lee Smith](#), a professor of public health at Anglia Ruskin University in the U.K. “High internal exposure [to these harmful compounds] is linked to potential neurotoxicity, developmental issues, and possible cancer risks,” he says.





Fresh bamboo shoots can be found at Asian markets, but they are also available canned at most grocery stores.

Anne B. Keiser, Nat Geo Image Collection



Bamboo shoots can be incorporated into many different recipes, like this sautéed chicken dish.

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These health perks are on top of bamboo shoots' naturally rich nutrient content: Not only do they have nearly three grams of protein in a cup and are low in fat and calories, but they also [contain](#) fiber, [essential amino acids](#), selenium, potassium, copper, phosphorus, iron, vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin E, vitamin K, thiamine, and niacin.

“They’re an interesting food that we all forgot about—it’s like a retro food that’s a pretty darn good source of nutrition,” says [Joan Salge Blake](#), a clinical professor of nutrition at Boston University and host of the nutrition and health podcast, *Spot On!* “With this much fiber, they’re going to be good at keeping you regular and they’re good for the gut microbiome.”

(You may be overlooking this nutritional powerhouse. You shouldn't.)

Plus, they bring something else to the table: an earthy, slightly nutty flavor and al dente texture to any dish they’re added to.

How to prep bamboo shoots

The key to reaping the health benefits from bamboo shoots is proper preparation. In order to consume them, bamboo shoots must be cooked; they can't be eaten raw—at least not by humans.

“Raw bamboo shoots contain cyanogenic glycosides, which break down to release toxic hydrogen cyanide, [which can] lead to acute cyanide poisoning,” Smith warns. In addition, “chronic, low-level exposure to these compounds is linked to a higher risk of developing goiter—enlargement of the thyroid gland—particularly in individuals with low iodine intake.”

To cook fresh bamboo shoots properly, start by rinsing them to remove dirt, then peel them and remove their fibrous outer layers.

The next step is to slice the shoots the way you want them—vertically, horizontally, or at an angle—says Bharathi Ramesh, a nutrition and food science professional based in Newark, Delaware. Bring a pot of water to a boil, add some salt, and drop the shoots into the pot; boil them for 30 minutes or until they become soft. “When you boil the shoots, you neutralize the cyanogenic glycosides,” Ramesh explains.



Aerial view of villagers drying bamboo shoots on July 10, 2023 in Fuzhou, Jiangxi Province of China. The ingredient is a culinary staple across Asian cuisines.

Zhu Haipeng, VCG/Getty Images

Once cooked, they can be added to stir-fries, stews, soups, curries, salads, omelets, rice, or other dishes.

“There’s a lot that goes into preparing them, and fresh bamboo shoots may not be widely available,” says Salge Blake. Your best bet is to visit an Asian market.

Fortunately, there’s a more user-friendly alternative: Canned bamboo shoots that have already been cooked are widely available at most grocery stores. “You can use fresh or canned bamboo shoots the same way,” says Abbie Gellman, a registered dietitian and chef based in New York City.

While the canning process may lead to a slight loss of micronutrients in bamboo shoots, says Ramesh, that may be worth it for the convenience factor. “It’s better to eat something that provides 80 percent of the nutrients that the fresh provides than not to eat it at all,” says Ramesh. These “are a very easy and convenient way to top up any dish you’re making with fiber and other nutrients.”