The Seeds Of Life

Plant an acorn and you get an oak tree. Scatter a pack of lettuce seed and you can look forward to weeks of delicious fresh salads. But seeds aren’t just for planting – you can eat them too, and they really are one of nature’s miracles. I regard seeds as ‘future foods’, each one a tiny powerhouse of nutrition that contains everything essential for the growth of a healthy new plant. You may already throw a few sesame seeds into the wok to add flavour to a stir-fry, mix sunflower seeds with your muesli for that extra nutty taste, or sprinkle sunflower seeds into a salad for their crunchy texture. But they deserve far better treatment than that.

If you want to boost your daily nutrition, reduce your risks of high cholesterol, heart disease, anaemia and osteoporosis, and give your energy levels a healthy shot in the arm, simply add a selection of seeds to your daily food and grow your own sprouting seeds.

**Poppy seeds:**
Great in all cake and biscuit recipes, in or on top of home made bread, even added to stews and stir frites, the unique flavour of poppy seeds comes together with masses of calcium and potassium, lots of iron and zinc and a modest amount of vitamin E.

**Pumpkin seeds:**
These have a taste all of their own and eaten as a snack, raw or toasted, they’re an excellent source of slow release energy full of the heart friendly monounsaturated fats and an extremely good source of zinc – a mineral which is worryingly below the necessary levels in most people’s diets in the UK. Zinc is vital for the production of healthy sperm and also for the protection of the prostate gland. Have the seeds in salads and sandwiches as well as health boosting nibbles.

**Sesame seeds:**
Used for centuries in the Middle and Far East where they’re renowned as aphrodisiacs thanks to their high vitamin E content. They’re also extremely rich in calcium, a good source of iron and supply some B vitamins. Their distinctly nutty flavour is an essential ingredient in Asian food where they’re traditionally added to stir frites. In the Middle East they’re made into tahini – like a thinner version of peanut butter – but they’re also delicious lightly toasted in a dry pan and sprinkled into salads, sandwiches, and combined into bread before baking.

**Sunflower seeds:**
The ancient Incas worshipped the sunflower as a holy plant and used its seeds as part of their staple diet. They’re a useful source of iron and zinc and an excellent source of selenium, another mineral for which most people fail to get even half the necessary daily amount. Selenium protects men against prostate cancer, women against breast cancer and everyone against heart disease. Like the other seeds you can add them to salads, savoury dishes, bread recipes, stir frites or just eat them by the handful.

All the seeds are an excellent source of protein and as well as being a great addition to everyone’s diet, they’re extremely important for their protein and mineral content for vegetarians and vegans.
Sprouting for Health and Vitality

Most of you will remember growing mustard and cress on a face flannel or sheet of damp blotting paper when you were kids. But sprouting isn’t child’s play; it’s an extremely serious way of giving everyone’s diet a huge boost of Supernutrients. It’s extremely cheap; it’s easy and something which you can all do at home. There’s nothing new about sprouting and this form of food has been used as medicine for more than five thousand years by Chinese physicians and sprouts have remained a staple part of the oriental diet to this day – try avoiding them in your local Chinese restaurant!! In spite of the fact that they’re mentioned in the Bible it’s taken centuries for western nutritionists to realise the true value of this amazing food source.

It’s universally acknowledged that to reduce the risks of heart disease and some forms of cancer we should all be eating less meat and less dairy products, and sprouts are the perfect way to make up for these reductions.

Nutritional values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sprouts</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Protein (gms)</th>
<th>Vitamin C</th>
<th>Folic Acid</th>
<th>Iron</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfalfa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mung beans</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radish</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soya bean</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These may not seem like huge amounts but bear in mind that they’re very low in calories, they’re extremely filling and sprouts form only a small part of your complete meal so what they add is extremely important.

However, these basic nutrients are only the tip of the iceberg, because the real importance of eating sprouted seeds is their exceptionally high content of natural plant chemicals or phytonutrients. Nothing could be fresher than eating your own sprouts as they continue growing up to the moment you eat them. They provide higher levels of vitamins, minerals, enzymes and phytonutrients than any other food per calorie consumed.

Getting Started

You can buy Dr Vogel BioSnacky sprouting jars or a three tier home sprouter from [www.avogel.co.uk](http://www.avogel.co.uk) I first used these, and their seeds back in 1970 and they remain the best value for money and the easiest to grow your own crops.

But if you can’t wait all you need is a large jam jar (1 litre capacity), a rubber band, some kitchen muslin, lots of fresh water and a packet of organic seeds. Then:

1. Put one tablespoon of seed into the jar, cover with the muslin, fix with rubber band, add water, swirl it round a few times to rinse, pour out the water through the muslin, add a cup of cold water and leave to soak.
2. Twice a day pour away any remaining water, add more cold water, swirl thoroughly, drain, then leave the jar muslin end down in a large bowl.
3. Eat and be healthy. Depending on which seeds you’ve used, within 3 to 6 days your sprouts will be between 1 and 2 inches long and ready to eat.
4. A word of warning – many commercial seeds have been treated with chemicals or have come from plants grown with agricultural chemicals so it really is essential to buy seeds specifically for sprouting, and preferably organic. Keep all jars and bowls scrupulously clean and rinse the sprouting seeds regularly to avoid moulds and mildews. It’s also sensible to wash sprouts and give them a quick spin in a salad drier before eating. If you’re not going to eat them when they’re ready make sure you keep them in the fridge.

**What to Sprout?**

There is now indisputable evidence that a group of plant hormones called phytoestrogens have an enormous impact on human health. They reduce and prevent any symptoms of the menopause, especially hot flushes; they protect against osteoporosis, heart disease and cancer; and although they are present in many plant foods you can benefit from exceptionally high levels in some of the sprouted seeds.

The added benefit is that these sprouts are also amongst the richest suppliers of protective antioxidants which fight against damaging free radicals that attack the body’s cells. Some of the sprouts were only just behind kale and Brussels in their antioxidant protective function.

**Alfalfa** – one of the most traditional of sprouts and most commonly served up in restaurants and salad bars. The delicious nutty flavour goes together with their powerful menopausal, cancer and heart disease protective benefits.

**Cress** – these slightly hot peppery sprouts are the ones we all remember from childhood, they have a high chlorophyll content and their great tangy flavour goes wonderfully in any egg or fish based sandwiches.

**Mung beans** – the traditional sprout in all Asian cooking, but you need to keep these sprouting in a dark cupboard otherwise they can be bitter. Very rich in vitamin C and an excellent source of folic acid. Sprinkle generously on top of a pizza before cooking or add a handful to your pasta sauce.

**Red clover** – these are a bit like alfalfa sprouts with a delicious sweet flavour but a powerful boost of natural plant hormones to help with all menstrual and menopausal problems. Stir into cottage cheese and serve with sliced fresh pear, pineapple or mango to put the bloom back on your skin.

**Broccoli** – long regarded as the most cancer protective of all the green vegetables, broccoli sprouts contain even more and they have a really lovely flavour. They’ll go with any type of salad but are particularly good added to an omelette.

**Super-Charged Sandwich Mix** – if you want to be really adventurous, mix together clover, alfalfa, radish and rape seed. The sharpness of the radish goes beautifully with the other flavours and this combination of plant hormones, natural anti-cancer chemicals and great nutritional content will turn any savoury sandwich into a vitality feast.

This is just a tiny selection of seeds which you can sprout in your own home. If you haven’t tried it before, have a go, and like me you’ll soon be hooked on the taste, the versatility and the fact that you can harvest your own fresh crops 365 days a year without even getting your boots muddy. This is also a wonderful way of getting children interested in food, gardening and nutrition, and if they help grow it they’re much more likely to eat it.