



Sprouting Seeds for Food

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Introduction

Seeds themselves are a very nutritious form of food because they contain proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and oils that a beginning plant needs to grow. Many of these nutritious components are increased greatly when the seeds are sprouted.

If their presence in restaurant salad bars and in grocery stores is any indication, the popularity of sprouts is increasing. It's very easy to grow your own sprouts at home with a minimal of supplies.

Buying Seeds

Experiment with different types of seeds, but remember that seeds sold for vegetable gardening are often treated with pesticides. Buy your seeds at a health food store. Sprouting seeds are also available from most seed catalogs and some grocery stores and are expressly labelled for this purpose.

Some Seeds You May Want To Try

alfalfa	dill	onion	sesame
barley	fenugreek	parsley	squash
buckwheat	kidney beans	peanut	sunflower
celery	lentils	pumpkin	(raw)
chia	lettuce	radish	wheat
corn	mung beans	rye	

Many others may be used, but never use seeds of poisonous plants or seeds that are old or moldy.

Methods

Seeds may be sprouted by many methods. The one requiring the least material is sprouting between two paper towels. Seeds are spread thinly between the paper towels, then the towels are moistened. Add water when the towels start to dry out. Once the seeds have sprouted, they may stick to the towels or may mold if left too long.

Sprout seeds may be sown in a shallow dish or pot filled with light potting soil and watered as needed. As the sprouts grow, they are clipped with scissors for use.

Probably, the easiest and most reliable method for sprouting is with a wide-mouth jar and screen of some type. Sprouting jars are sold for up to \$10 in some stores, but any jar will do. The wide-mouth quart canning jar is preferred because of the ease of getting the sprouts out and because it is the standard size of sprouting screens sold in health food and other stores. A quart mayonnaise jar also works well.

Cheesecloth may be secured onto the jar with a rubber band. It works well, but is a little messy and wasteful of expensive cheesecloth; those who want to do a lot of sprouting may want to make or purchase a more permanent sprouter top. Stainless steel screening can be secured to the top with a canning jar ring. Metal screens are sold in a variety of mesh sizes for different types of seeds. The only problem with them is that the rings tend to rust (even though the screens don't). Plastic sprouter tops, therefore, are a successful alternative. These, too, are available in a variety of mesh sizes. One version has a single top in which the mesh size may be changed by moving an inner screen.

Regardless of the jar or screen you choose, the procedure is the same. Start with a small amount of seeds (1 tablespoon to 1/4 cup depending on seed size), and soak in water 12 to 24 hours.

Attach screen (small mesh for small seeds, etc.), and pour off the water. Rinse twice in cool water and pour off each time. Tilt the jar bottom up in a bowl or near a sink to drain off excess water. Repeat rinsing and draining two to three times a day to prevent the seeds from turning sour. Sprout rinse water may be re-used to water house plants as a conservation practice.

There is some controversy over whether sprouts are better grown in light or in the dark. It is really a matter of personal preference; however, there may be a slight nutritional advantage to the light-grown sprouts. Sprouts grown in light are greener and have a stronger taste. To keep sprouts white (blanched), put them in a cupboard or other warm, dark place while they are growing. If you do choose this method, it is helpful to put a note on a cabinet or refrigerator to remind you to rinse them.

Let sprouts grow until they are the size you want them. Taste at various sizes so you can decide how long to let them grow. Large seeds tend to get soft and become moldy if left too long at room temperature and will lose quality rapidly. As seeds grow, you may want to change to a larger screen so that hulls will wash out before "harvest." Hulls are edible, but do affect the taste and storage qualities of most seeds.

When sprouts are ready for eating (usually after three to six days), rinse off excess hulls and drain thoroughly. Store in plastic bags in refrigerator. Small-seeded sprouts keep fairly well for a week or more; larger-seeded ones are best if eaten within three to four days.

Uses

Sprouts are often eaten in salads, but they have many other uses, too:

- soups
- sandwiches (a great lettuce substitute)
- omelettes
- breads (mix into dough)
- casseroles
- Chinese dishes
- vegetable dishes
- alone as a snack (try sunflower seeds) backpacking food (sprout in a plastic container left in an outer pouch so that it's easy to get to them for rinsing)

If you become really involved in sprouting, there are several elaborate devices for quantity sprout production. Consult seed and gourmet catalogs.

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