

Health Benefits of Zucchini



Zucchini, also called *courgetti*, is a member of the gourd family. Although it is a variety of summer squash, it can be found widely available year-round in the US. Zucchini is botanically categorized as a fruit because it contains seeds inside, but is generally considered a vegetable in the culinary world. They can be found in a variety of colors from yellow, light green to dark green and have a soft, buttery interior. Similarly shaped to cucumbers, they have a subtle taste, making them easy to incorporate into many dishes.



WHAT MAKES ZUCCHINI GREAT?

Nutrition

1 cup chopped, raw with skin provides 20 Calories, 1 gm fiber, 1 gm protein, 0.2 gm fat, no cholesterol

Weight Loss and Maintenance

Zucchini is very low in calories due to a high-water content. Zucchini is 94% water and provide a sense of fullness, making it an aid in weight loss. Zucchini, like other plant foods, is a source of dietary fiber. Increasing fiber can also aid in satiety as well as improve digestion and reduce constipation.

Vitamins

Zucchini contain essential B vitamins including riboflavin, thiamin, niacin, and B6 and a good source of vitamin C.

Minerals

Zucchini is rich in minerals including potassium which helps maintain normal blood pressure. Magnesium regulates protein synthesis and nerve function, blood glucose control and blood pressure. It is required for DNA synthesis and energy production. Calcium maintains muscle contraction and supports healthy bones and teeth. Phosphorus is also a component of bones and teeth and is important for gene expression and energy production.

Antioxidants

Zucchini is a good source of health-protecting antioxidants including vitamin C which helps form collagen to hold tissues, bones, and muscles together. It protects us from infection and bruising and helps our body absorb iron and folate. Like all antioxidants, it protects against cell damage. Zeaxanthin and lutein fight free radicals reducing age-related eye conditions like cataracts and glaucoma. Beta-carotene, a plant pigment, is converted to vitamin A which fights aging and disease. Eating zucchini can also help maintain healthy cholesterol levels. The beta-carotene and vitamin C can help prevent the oxidation of cholesterol and reduce arterial plaque.

BUYING, STORING AND USING ZUCCHINI

Buying

The zucchini growing season in the US peaks between May and July. When selecting zucchini, pick squash that are approximately 6 inches in length and 1-2 inches in diameter. Larger zucchinis tend to be more bitter and fibrous. Look for sleek, smooth, non-blemished squash that is bright in color. When preparing, keep in mind everything but the stem is edible. Leaving the peel on provides additional fiber benefits.

Storing

Avoid washing or cutting your zucchini until ready for use. Store uncut zucchini in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator drawer. This method will keep your uncut zucchini fresh for up to 2 weeks. Once cut, use within 2-4 days.



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Using

Zucchini can be consumed raw or cooked. Use raw slices on sandwiches, cube or shred for fresh salads, or slice for use with hummus or dip. Make zucchini noodles, or *zoodles*, by using a spiralizer or a julienne peeler. Use zoodles instead of pasta noodles to increase vegetables in your diet. Chop into quarters and sauté in a pan on the stove, roast with salt and pepper, or arrange slices in a single layer on a baking sheet to make chips. Try making zucchini bread the whole family will enjoy.



Photo source: cleananddelicious.com

Zucchini Chips

cookingis1.com

Ingredients:

2 medium zucchini, sliced in rounds
 1/4 cup olive oil 1/4 tsp paprika
 1/2 tsp garlic powder salt and pepper to taste
 2/3 cup grated parmesan cheese

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Line baking sheet with parchment paper.
3. Combine the olive oil, salt, pepper, paprika and garlic powder. Add the zucchini and toss to coat.
4. Place zucchini slices individually on the baking sheet and sprinkle with parmesan.
5. Bake 15-17 minutes, until the top is golden.

REFERENCES

Nutritiondata.self.com
Ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets
Organicfacts.net

Classic Zucchini Bread

Adapted from Thewholesomedish.com

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups grated zucchini, lightly packed, do not drain liquid	1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
1 cup granulated sugar	1 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 cup packed light brown sugar or coconut sugar	1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 cup unsweetened applesauce	1/2 tsp baking soda
1/3 cup vegetable oil	1/2 tsp salt
2 large eggs (or 2 Tbsp ground flax meal and 6 Tbsp warm water)	1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9x5 inch loaf pan with cooking spray or reduce use of oil by lining with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, add the grated zucchini, sugar, brown sugar, applesauce, oil, eggs or egg replacement, and vanilla. Whisk until well combined.
3. Add the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Stir just until no dry flour remains. Do not over mix.
4. Pour the batter into the loaf pan. Bake 50 to 55 minutes. A toothpick inserted into the center of the bread should come out with moist crumbs on it.
5. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Remove from the pan and transfer to a wire cooling rack to cool completely before slicing. Store covered in the refrigerator.
6. Best served after it has been refrigerated for at least 12 hours.