

Health Benefits of Dates



Dates are the sweet, chewy fruit of the date palm tree. They are possibly the oldest cultivated fruit in the world, used for 6,000 years in the Middle East.

Dates are classified as soft, semidry or dry and come in many varieties. The most common is the Medjool date, nicknamed “king of the dates,” for its large size and deep caramel color. Deglet Noor and Halawy dates are varieties also commonly found in the US.

WHAT MAKES DATES GREAT?

Nutrition

- 1 large dried, pitted Medjool date provides 67 Calories, 1.5 gm protein, 2 gm fiber and no fat or cholesterol

Vitamins

According to the USDA, dates are a good source of B vitamins, including thiamin, niacin, and beta-carotene and a small amount of vitamin C. They also contain vitamin K important for blood clotting and bone formation.

Dates are a good source of antioxidants, mainly carotenoids and phenolics which fight aging and disease.

Minerals

Potassium is key in maintaining fluid balance and regulating blood pressure. Calcium and magnesium are important for strong bones and teeth, muscle contraction, energy production and cellular communication.

Dates also contain small amounts of iron which helps to carry oxygen in the blood and copper which plays a role in iron metabolism. Zinc is important for wound healing and immunity.

Selenium in dates plays a role in reproduction, hormone metabolism, DNA synthesis and acts as an antioxidant to protect against oxidation and infection.

Fiber

Insoluble fiber in dates promotes healthy digestion and feeds healthy gut microbes that help defend against some forms of cancer. Fiber in dates can also help relieve constipation. Soluble fiber helps lower cholesterol.

BUYING AND USING DATES

Most date crops in the US are grown in southwestern California and Arizona where there is high heat and low humidity. Because dates are difficult to harvest, prices can range from \$6 to \$10 per pound. Dates can be found at farmers’ markets, in bags on grocery shelves or ordered online from specialty markets.

Dates are commonly golden brown with a crinkly skin due to the natural sugar crystals. Because of their high sugar content, they are slow to spoil. Leave them covered at room temperature for up to a week, or place them in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to six months.

Things to do with dates:

- Stuff dates with ground pistachios and top with unsweetened coconut or stuff with walnut half, pinch closed and roll in flax meal, or stuff with peanut butter
- Create date paste for an easy, all-purpose sweetener for use in sauces or baking recipes. Sweeten tea or coffee
- Add chopped dates to oatmeal, salads or unsweetened yogurt. Toss into mashed potatoes or veggie stir fry or make date nut breads
- Grind with nuts to form flourless pie crusts
- They don’t need refrigeration so pack in school lunches or as a snack on long hikes
- Poke in skewers and use to decorate cakes, cupcakes, pies or seasonal food displays



Oregon State
University

stephanie.polizzi@oregonstate.edu
631 Alder Street, Myrtle Point, OR 97458
541-572-5263 ext 25291
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos>

Date Paste

thehealthyfoodie.com

Ingredients:

8-10 pitted dates Optional vanilla and salt
3/4 cup water

Directions:

1. Pack dates tightly into a Mason jar and add water to the top of jar.
2. Let dates soak overnight, at least 12 hours or until they are soft.
3. Transfer dates into food processor, including the water, and blend 5-8 minutes until it forms a smooth paste the consistency of peanut butter. If you need more moisture, add a splash of vanilla.
4. Put paste back into Mason jar to store. Paste can be stored in the refrigerator up to 3 months.
5. Use in place of refined sugar in oatmeal, muffin or cookie mix, salad dressings or sauces.

Chocolate Date Walnut Pie Crust

By Chrissy Carroll
www.snackinginsneakers.com

Gluten and flour free, bake or no bake pie crust

Ingredients:

1 cup shelled walnuts
15 pitted dates or about 3/4 cup
1/4 cup cocoa powder

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a food processor and pulse several times until the mixture is crumbly and starts to stick together.
2. If your pie crust isn't holding together, add a little more date to get the stickiness you need.
3. Lightly grease a pie plate with cooking spray or coconut oil. Press crust mixture into pie plate.
4. Add fillings as desired.
5. This crust can be used with no bake or bake recipes.

Variations

- 1 1/4 cup walnuts + 1 cup dates
- 1 cup walnuts + 1/2 cup dates + 1/2 cup shredded coconut

No-bake Fig Newtons

Minimalistbaker.com

Cookie Dough Ingredients:

1/4 cup original cooking oats
1 cup raw almonds
1 cup raw pecans
1 1/4 cup firmly packed
pitted dates (about 23-26)
1/4 tsp sea salt

Filling Ingredients:

8 ounces dried figs
1 tsp orange zest
1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
8-10 whole pitted dates

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and line baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Arrange oats and nuts on baking sheet and bake 8-12 minutes, rotating halfway to ensure even cooking. Cool.
3. Add cooled nuts, oats and sea salt to food processor and process into a fine meal. Remove and set aside.
4. Add pitted dates to food processor and pulse until it forms into a ball. Add nut/oat mixture and pulse until loose dough is formed when squeezed between two fingers.
5. Spread dough onto clean parchment paper and flatten with hands. Top with parchment paper and roll out to 1/4 inch thick. Remove top parchment paper and form into rectangle. Cut in half into two equal strips.
6. For filling, add figs to mixing bowl and cover with hot water. Soak 3 minutes and drain, retaining water.
7. Put figs in food processor. Add orange zest, cinnamon and salt and process into a ball. Mix in dates and process until blended. Add reserved fig water a little at a time until it starts to form a paste. It should be thick but spreadable.
8. Spread the paste down the center of your dough strips, keeping clear from borders. Use parchment paper to gently roll dough over filling forming a log. Freeze logs at least 30 minutes or overnight. Then use a sharp knife to slice into 1" slices.
9. Store in refrigerator for up to 1 week or freezer up to one month.

REFERENCES

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