

# Health Benefits of Amaranth



Amaranth is a small, yellow, ancient grain, slightly larger than a poppy seed, that has been cultivated for over 8,000 years. Its name means “unfading” in Greek and it was a staple food of the Inca, Maya and Aztec civilizations. It has a sweet, nutty flavor and is rich in nutrients, fiber and protein. It belongs to the family of beets and spinach and is a gluten-free seed or pseudograin.

## WHAT MAKES AMARANTH GREAT?

### **Nutrition**

½ cup cooked amaranth has 126 Calories, 5 gm protein, 3 gm fiber, 2 gm unsaturated fat and no cholesterol.

### **Protein**

Amaranth has a full complement of essential amino acids giving this grain the designation of a complete protein. It is particularly high in lysine, an amino acid often missing in grains.

### **Vitamins**

Amaranth is rich in antioxidants including vitamin C, gallic acid, carotenoids and selenium. These antioxidants defend against free radicals which can damage cells and contribute to aging and development of chronic disease.

Many of these compounds may help to reduce the body’s over-production of immunoglobulin E which is responsible for chronic inflammation. Other vitamins include B vitamins, particularly folate important to prevent birth defects.

### **Minerals**

Amaranth contains iron, calcium, phosphorus, manganese, magnesium and selenium. It contains a full daily dose of manganese, important for more than 300 enzyme reactions including immune response, hormones, blood and bone formation.

Phosphorus is also important for bone formation and energy production. Magnesium is important for energy production, glucose control, muscle and nerve function and blood pressure regulation. Amaranth also contains potassium and zinc.

### **Fiber**

Amaranth’s fiber profile is more closely similar to fruits and vegetables than to other cereal grains. The fiber contributes to a range of biologic functions such as antioxidation, anti-cancer and regulation of our immune system.

Fiber is associated with improved gut health, appetite and weight control, blood sugar modulation and reduced risk of multiple chronic diseases.

### **Phytonutrients**

Phytonutrients are plant compounds that augment vitamins and minerals. Phytonutrients in amaranth include phenolic compounds, betacyanins, tocopherols and carotenoids, all of which contribute antioxidant properties. Their actions are associated with lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity.

## BUYING & USING AMARANTH

Amaranth can be found as whole seeds and ground flour, mostly in specialty stores and online. It is a multipurpose grain/seed which can be used for sweet or savory dishes. For example, in Mexico, amaranth flour is used to make tortillas and alegria candy which translates to “joy.”

Like other grains, amaranth must be cooked before eating in order to absorb nutrients. It can be prepared in water and cooked like oatmeal for porridge, or popped like popcorn and used in salads or desserts.



**Oregon State**  
University

stephanie.polizzi@oregonstate.edu

541-572-5263 ext 25291

[https://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos/  
healthy-families-communities](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos/healthy-families-communities)

**To pop amaranth**, select a pot with high sides to avoid seeds popping out of the pot. Heat the pot, dry, over medium-high heat. Pour 1/8 cup of amaranth into pot and shake or stir gently until it pops and turns white. Keep a close eye on it since it takes only minutes and may burn. Transfer popped amaranth to a bowl and continue popping 1/8 cup at a time until all is popped.

Popped amaranth can be eaten as a snack, tossed over salads, stirred into smoothies or baked goods or used to make high-protein cookies or bars.

Amaranth makes a healthy, high-protein breakfast porridge or can be cooked in soups for thickening, and added protein. Amaranth can also be combined with other grains like rice. Use 1/4 cup amaranth to 3/4 cup other grain for a nutty addition.

Amaranth flour, being gluten-free, is often used for flat breads and tortillas. When using in baked goods, substitute amaranth for about 10% of gluten flour in recipe. Amaranth flour will darken the crumb slightly and add a nutty flavor.



### Alegria Mexican Candy

Redpathsugar.com

#### Ingredients:

5 cups popped amaranth	1/4 cup honey
1/2 cup pepitas (pumpkin seeds), toasted	1/4 tsp salt
1/4 cup sesame seeds, toasted	1 Tbsp lime juice
1 1/4 cup sugar	2 tsp lime zest
1/2 cup water	1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

#### Instructions:

1. Line a 9x9" baking pan with parchment paper, leaving 2" overhang on sides for easy unmolding.
2. Combine dry ingredients in large bowl.
3. In a medium saucepan, add sugar, water and honey and stir gently. Add candy thermometer and heat to 250°F. Turn off heat and stir in lime juice, zest and cinnamon.
4. Pour sugar mixture over amaranth and stir well.
5. Press mixture into pan and set in cool area to harden.
6. Use a sharp knife to cut cooled mixture into bars or squares.

### Amaranth Patties

Gourmandelle.com

#### Ingredients:

1/2 cup amaranth  
 1 cup red lentils  
 1/2 cup chopped parsley  
 1 onion, diced  
 1 large egg (or 1 Tbsp flax meal in 3 Tbsp warm water)  
 4 Tbsp nutritional yeast  
 1/2 cup breadcrumbs  
 Sliced black olives (optional)  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 2 Tbsp oil

#### Instructions:

1. Add lentils and amaranth to pot. Cover with water and boil 15 minutes. Strain and put into large bowl.
2. Combine all remaining ingredients in bowl with amaranth and form patties, adding more breadcrumbs if necessary.
3. Fry patties in oil over medium-high heat for 2 minutes. Flip and fry 2 minutes more.
4. Drain cooked patties on paper towel.
5. Serve plain with salt and pepper or top with apple sauce.

## REFERENCES

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