

Health Benefits of Papaya



Papaya is a sweet, tropical fruit native to Mexico and South America. Today, it is grown all over the world in warm climates like Brazil and India. In the US, papaya is grown mainly in Hawaii. The fruit, or berry, grows from a large bush sometimes referred to a *papaw* or *pawpaw*.

At one time, papayas were grown in Florida but were destroyed by a virus. Today, many papaya varieties have been genetically modified to resist this virus.

Mexican papaya varieties include Maradol, Caribbean Red and Passion Red. These large, oval varieties can be found in many US and Latino supermarkets. Hawaiian varieties, mostly the Solo type, are smaller, round or pear-shaped, and slightly sweeter.

All varieties of papaya provide vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that offer a wide range of health benefits.

WHAT MAKES PAPAYA GREAT?

Nutrition

1 small or 1 cup cubed papaya provides 62 calories, <1 gm protein, 3 gm fiber, and no fat or cholesterol.

Vitamins

Papayas are rich in antioxidants such as vitamin C, beta-carotene, lutein, zeaxanthin and vitamin E. Antioxidants protect against infection and aging and can lower chronic inflammation. Folate in papaya lowers homocysteine, reducing risk of heart disease.

Papayas also contain small amounts of other B vitamins thiamin, riboflavin and pantothenic acid, and vitamin K. Lycopene in papayas can reduce risk of prostate cancer.

Minerals

Papayas contain potassium important for healthy blood pressure, magnesium for heart health and calcium for strong bones. Small amounts of zinc help with wound-healing and sense of taste.

Fiber

One papaya contributes 3 grams of fiber to the recommended minimum intake of 25 grams. Fiber aids in reducing constipation, hemorrhoids and risk of colorectal cancer. Fiber also feeds our healthy gut microbiome.

BUYING & USING PAPAYA

There are many varieties of papaya but the two main types found in the US are Mexican and Hawaiian. The Mexican variety can grow up to 10 pounds in size and has a yellow-orange skin. Hawaiian mangos are smaller, about the size of a pear, range from yellow to pink skin. Both varieties have a sweet, orange flesh inside. The dark gelatinous seeds are edible with a peppery flavor. Harvests can peak in early summer or fall.

The entire fruit is edible, including the skin, flesh and seeds.

Fruits can be round, oval or kidney-shaped with green, yellow, orange or red skin. A ripe papaya will be yellow, orange to pink or a combination of each, and yield to gentle pressure. Green papaya will ripen if left at room temperature for a few days. When unripe, the interior flesh is green and must be cooked. Green papaya is often used for stir-fries and in Asian dishes.



Wash ripened fruit well and cut in half lengthwise. Scoop out seeds. Remove flesh from skin (or opt to leave skin intact). Toss diced papaya in salads, salsas, smoothies or cereal. Puree for a thick juice. Papaya can also be found dried for an on-the-go snack or used in baked goods. The seeds have a slight peppery flavor and can be used in soups or dressings.

Marinade made with papaya, soy sauce, lime juice and pepper helps make meat tender and easier to digest. Try mixing papaya with ginger and sugar to make mango jam, or just enjoy as snack or dessert.



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Try combining diced papaya with 2 tablespoons chia seeds, 1 cup almond milk and ¼ teaspoon vanilla. Mix well and refrigerate before eating.

The most popular Mexican papaya dishes include eating the fruits fresh, papaya salad, atchara, a crunchy side dish of unripe papaya pickled and mixed with ginger, peppers, onions, and garlic. Another dish uses the unripe fruit to make a filling which is rolled in pasty and fried (much like an egg roll) and used as a snack.

CAUTION:

Papayas contain a substance called *chitinase*, which is found in many common foods (bananas, kiwifruit, avocado, tomatoes). Parts of the chitinase molecule are similar to those in rubber latex and may trigger an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals known as latex-fruit syndrome.

Unripe papaya, also called green, contains the highest potential for allergic reactions. Sensitive individuals should not consume unripe papaya.

Mexican Papaya Salad

feastingathome.com

Salad Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup red onion, sliced
- 2-3 large handfuls of salad greens
- ½ large ripe papaya (3-4 cups)
- 1-2 small cucumbers
- 1 Tbsp thinly sliced jalapeno (optional)
- 1 sliced avocado (optional)

Dressing:

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 4 Tbsp lime juice
- 1 Tbsp lime zest
- 2 Tbsp chopped cilantro
- 1 Tbsp chopped scallion
- 2 tsp honey
- ½ tsp coriander
- Pinch of chili flakes
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Soak sliced red onions in salted water while you make the salad. Drain.
2. Halve, seed, peel and cube one half of the papaya or enough to yield 3-4 cups of ¾" cubes.
3. Place the greens in a large serving bowl. Toss with ½ of the red onions. Place the papaya on top of the greens.
4. Scatter cucumber over the papaya along with remaining red onions.
5. Mix dressing ingredients in a small bowl or jar. Spoon it over the salad right before serving, gently tossing. Sprinkle with cilantro leaves and optional avocado and/or jalapeno slices.

Easy Papaya Marinade

thespruceeats.com

Ingredients:

- 1 small papaya
- 1/3 cup soy sauce
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp pepper
- 1 tsp salt, optional

Instructions:

1. Chop papaya into chunks. Place in blender or food processor with remaining ingredients and process until pureed. Add water if mixture is too thick.
2. Refrigerate overnight before using as marinade for meat or vegetables.

Papaya Salsa

theherbeevore.com

Ingredients:

- 1 large papaya
- ½ large red onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeds removed
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 limes juiced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- freshly ground black pepper

Instructions:

1. Slice papaya in half lengthwise, scoop out seeds, remove skin, and finely dice.
2. Add the onion, garlic, jalapeno, cilantro, salt, and lime juice. Pulse again until your salsa reaches the desired consistency.
3. Garnish with cracked pepper and enjoy as a dip or topping.

REFERENCES

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