

## Simple Sprouting for Summer

*It's time for another look at the health-food store's mainstay. You can try this at home!*

By KATHERINE JAMIESON

If a seed is pure potential, then a sprout is the promise of greater things to come. Sprouting is a simple way to increase the vitamin, mineral, and protein content of common nuts, seeds, grains, or legumes. Because sprouts will grow in any climate and require no soil or sunlight, sprouting can be done in any season, anywhere. They cause no waste in preparation and are incredibly economical; for about a nickel, it is possible to raise enough mung bean sprouts for a highly nutritious meal.

**SPROUTS** *Some say crisp sprouts, not granola, earned some liberal thinkers the label "crunchy."*



Sprouts' healing qualities stem from the fact that they are, in a sense, predigested. During sprouting, foods are broken down into their major component parts: starch into simple sugars, protein into amino acids and peptides, and crude fat into free fatty acids. Simultaneously, vitamin and enzyme content increases dramatically. Sprouting produces significant amounts of vitamin C, increases vitamin B content, and spikes carotene content, sometimes eightfold. The Chinese are usually credited with first recognizing the boons of

sprouted beans, which they carried on ships to prevent scurvy.

Ongoing studies by the National Institutes of Health, the American Cancer Society, and Johns Hopkins University have provided substantial scientific evidence to confirm the powerful nutritional properties of sprouts. However, even as

they are touted for preventing menopausal symptoms, cancer, and heart disease, concern has been growing about the safety of eating sprouts. Between 1995 and 1999, health officials named sprouts as the culprit in 10 food-borne disease outbreaks in the United States, and in 2002, the FDA issued a health advisory against eating raw and undercooked sprouts.

Ironically, the most controversial of all sprouts is the informal mascot of the health-food movement: alfalfa. The tiny seed has rich mineralization for its root can grow over 100 feet into the ground and draw on trace elements inaccessible to other plants. Arabs first named it "alfalfa," meaning "father of all food," after discovering its fortifying properties for themselves and their racehorses. However, tests have shown that alfalfa seeds contain a significant amount of the amino acid canavanine, leading some nutritionists to discourage eating them. Canavanine inhibits the immune system and worsens inflammation in cases of rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Alfalfa has also been the sprout most associated with E. coli and salmonella contamination.

So the question remains: how to grow your sprouts and eat them too? Cooking breaks down natural toxins in the sprouts and kills bacteria, and historically the Chinese have cooked mung bean sprouts in their dishes. For elderly people, the very young, and those with compromised immune systems, it's highly advisable to cook your sprouts well. However, raw food advocates argue that the main benefits of sprouts come from the raw form. >>

*Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders. —Henry D. Thoreau*

## { STIR-FRIED SPROUTS WITH CASHEWS }

### Ingredients

6 brussels sprouts, trimmed and sliced into 1/4-inch strips  
6 ounces sprouted lentils, peas, adzuki, or other firm sprouts  
1 1/2 tablespoons sesame or mustard oil  
1/4 teaspoon cumin seeds  
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1 bunch scallions, including 2 inches of the greens, chopped  
1 small onion, quartered and thinly sliced  
1/2 cup toasted cashews  
Salt  
2 tablespoons lime juice to taste

**1** Steam the brussels sprouts until barely tender, then rinse and set aside. Steam the sprouted beans until they're tender, 3 to 5 minutes.

**2** Heat the oil in a wok, add the cumin seeds, and fry until they're aromatic and lightly browned. Add the garlic and, as soon as it begins to color, add the scallions and onion. Stir-fry until the onion is translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Lower the heat and add the brussels sprouts, sprouted legumes, and cashews. Cook, uncovered, for 1 minute more or until heated through. Remove from the heat and season with salt and lime juice to taste.

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(Cooking also turns the alfalfa sprouts into an inedible mush.)

If you still want to eat raw sprouts, the FDA recommends buying "crisp-looking" sprouts with the buds still attached, and avoiding "musty-smelling, dark or slimy-looking sprouts." Buy them refrigerated and then keep them refrigerated, at 40 degrees or lower. Wash your hands well before and after handling raw foods, and rinse the sprouts themselves thoroughly. Following these guidelines should help sprouts be a delicious and healthful addition to your cooking.

### SPROUT YOUR OWN IN FOUR STEPS

Most seeds, grains, and legumes can be sprouted, though some taste better than others. Make sure they are from a reputable source that complies with current safety standards. One ounce of dry seed equals about one cup of mature sprouts.

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**1. Assemble equipment:** You will need widemouthed jars, such as mason jars, and some way to strain the water from your growing sprouts. Traditionally, cheesecloth or wire mesh has been used, with a rubber band or string to secure it.



**ADZUKI** beans sprouted in a screen-top mason jar.

Sprouting kits include plastic tops with different size straining holes.

**2. Soak:** Use one part seed to at least three parts purified or spring water. After rinsing several times, place seeds in a covered jar. Depending on the size of the seed, you will need to soak them anywhere from 6 (for tinier seeds) to 12 hours (for bigger seeds).

**3. Drain:** Drain off the water and rinse. Tilt the jar so the sprouts are at a 45-degree angle—this can be done easily in a dish rack. Seeds will sprout faster in hot or humid weather. Air should be able to circulate over the sprouts.

**4. Rinse often:** Rinse and drain the sprouts 2 or more times a day for the next 3 to 6 days using fresh water. Rinsing keeps the sprouts moist through the whole process.

To avoid molding or spoilage, you will want to make sure the sprouts are well drained after rinsing. +

## { ALMOND MILK }

Almond milk can be enjoyed for its own sake or as an alternative to regular milk for people who are lactose intolerant. Made from the seed kernel of the fruit of the flowering almond tree (a member of the rose family), almond milk can also be a good substitute in dairy-based recipes. Try it in cereal, or cooked with grains, for a sweet, nutty flavor.

### Ingredients

1 cup raw, unsalted almonds  
4 cups water

**1** Place the almonds in a glass jar with a straining lid or cheesecloth.

**2** Rinse the nuts several times, and then cover with 4 cups water. Soak overnight to begin the early stage of sprouting.

**3** Rinse the nuts a final time and then pour them into a blender with 3 cups fresh water. Blend until smooth.

**4** Strain the pulp through cheesecloth or a fine mesh sieve, applying pressure to squeeze out all liquid.

### Tips for Using and Enjoying

#### Almond Milk

**1** Honey and vanilla will enhance the flavor of the milk.

**2** The almond paste pulp can be used to top cereal, vegetables, or rice.

**3** 1 pound shelled almonds = 3 cups halves or 4 cups slivered.