

Chia Seed Profile

Also known as

Salvia hispanica, California Chia, California Sage, Chia Pet Seed, and Chia Sage.

Introduction

When we think of Chia seeds, invariably an image comes to mind of the Chia Pet – a clay figurine with Chia sprouts for hair. However, most of us do not realize that Chia seed is highly nutritious, medicinal, and it has been used for centuries for its beneficial properties. Chia was a staple for Incan, Mayan, and Aztec cultures. “Chia” is even the Mayan word for “strength”, and Chia seeds used to be referred to as “Indian Running Food” because they are so energizing. Apache and Aztec warriors sustained themselves by bringing the seeds along while on conquests, Aztecs used Chia as a legal tender, Indians of the southwest depended upon them during long trading expeditions, and they were also used by the Indians and missionaries as a poultice for gunshot wounds and other injuries. Today, Chia seed is being rediscovered and embraced as a “superfood”, and it is quickly becoming popular among nutritionists and herbalists alike.

Constituents

Essential fatty acids alpha-linolenic and linoleic acid, mucin, strontium, 30% protein, Vitamins A, B, E, and D, and minerals including calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, iron, iodine, copper, zinc, sodium, magnesium, manganese, niacin, thiamine, silicon, and anti-oxidants.

Parts Used

The seeds raw, cooked, or sprouted.

Typical Preparations

1-4 Tablespoons of the raw seeds may be used per day, mixing them into water, juice, or a smoothie. Chia seeds can be ground into a powder and added to smoothies, used in baking or cooking, or substituted for Flax seeds in recipes. They have a pleasant nutty flavor.

The sprouted seeds can be added to salads and sandwiches.

One of the most common ways to consume Chia seeds is to make a Chia gel. To make Chia gel, place 1/3 cup Chia seeds into a sealable container, add 2 cups of water, and whisk briskly. Let the mixture sit for 5-10 minutes, and then whisk again before placing into the refrigerator. The mixture will turn into a gel, and will last up to 3 weeks if refrigerated. The recommended dosage is 3 Tablespoons 3 times per day, and the gel may be incorporated into jam, cereal, yogurt, smoothies, or any other foods for consumption. One pound of Chia seeds will make approximately 24 cups of gel, which will last over a month if consumed at the recommended amount of 3 tablespoons of gel 3 times per day.

Summary

Touted as being the new 'superfood', Chia seeds are high in easily digestible protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins, soluble fiber, antioxidants, minerals, and are a digestive, disinfectant, febrifuge and ophthalmic. They are currently being used for their nutritional and medicinal properties, endurance for athletes, for suppressing the appetite, weight loss, leveling blood sugar, and for aiding intestinal regularity. Chia seeds readily dissolve into the water, creating a substance that looks like gelatin. This gel-forming action is due to the soluble fiber in the Chia seed. Researchers believe that this same gel-forming phenomenon takes place in the stomach when Chia seed is consumed, thus creating a physical barrier between carbohydrates and digestive enzymes and slowing the conversion of carbohydrates into sugar. Slowing the conversion of carbohydrates into sugar helps with endurance and metabolic rates, which is beneficial for athletes and others. For weight loss, Chia seeds are an appetite suppressant, and Chia gel may be used to replace food within recipes. Bulking up a meal with Chia gel helps lessen the amount of food consumed, since Chia gel is primarily made up of water. Chia gel may also be used in place of fats within recipes, even within baked goods. Chia seed has hydrophilic properties, and can absorb more than 12 times its weight in water. Because of this, Chia seeds can prolong hydration, helping retain moisture and regulate more efficiently the body's absorption of nutrients and body fluids, including electrolyte balance.

Precautions

There is currently no evidence of adverse effects of whole or ground Chia seeds. As with any dietary supplement consult your healthcare practitioner before using this product, especially if you are pregnant, nursing or under medical supervision.