

Chia: More Than Simply a Pet

Most of us know of chia from three decades of TV commercials about “the pottery that grows!” However, this humble little seed from Mexico and Guatemala has much more amazing potential for us to discover—so much that it now looks like 2013 will undoubtedly become known as the year we “rediscovered” chia. (If you count the original Chia Pet, then it’s the year we “re-rediscovered” chia.)

Chia’s fascinating story began thousands of years ago, when chia seeds were a daily staple in the diets of ancient Mayans and Aztecs. In fact, the word *chia* is derived from the Mayan language, meaning “strength,” and Aztec warriors relied on chia seeds to boost energy and increase stamina. Recently, this tiny seed became a favorite of athletes, especially distance runners, who tout it as an endurance-enhancing superfood. Today, we are finding out there is so much more to chia’s story.

Chia also provides your body with vitamins A, B, E and D and minerals such as calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, molybdenum, niacin, phosphorous, potassium, silicon, sodium, sulphur, thiamine and zinc. Chia seeds are also an amazing source of protein, and they help to modulate blood sugar, which is great news for diabetics.

Plus, if you’re looking to boost your nutritional intake, look no further than the chia seed. Per gram, chia seeds contain:

- 8 times more omega-3 than salmon
- 6 times more calcium than milk
- 3 times more iron than spinach
- 15 times more magnesium than broccoli
- 2 times more fiber than bran flakes
- 6 times more protein than kidney beans
- 4 times more phosphorous than whole milk

Because chia seeds are so versatile, different types of chia seed products are now popping up everywhere—chia snacks, chia bars, chia drinks. Along with the ready-made products, chia is readily available in its raw form, which can be used in many ways. It can be made into pudding or used as an egg substitute for the vegan crowd. Or you can sprinkle it into your yogurt, oatmeal or smoothie. Some people simply add it to their water.

For those of you currently using flaxseed in your diet, you may want to consider switching to chia. With flaxseed, you have to grind it, then use it before it goes rancid. Chia is much easier to use (it doesn't need grinding and has a much longer shelf life), and its benefits are superior to flaxseed.

Oh, and just in case you were wondering, the new Ch-Ch-Ch-Chia Pet this year is Chia Hello Kitty.

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