Growing and Using Sprouts

Sprouts are great to eat for everyday living and especially so in an emergency situation. Typical foods set aside for storage are traditionally low or nonexistent in vitamin C and many of the B vitamins. Yet it is exciting to know the seeds from those same storage foods can be sprouted to give a rich source of these important nutrients. Sprouts are an excellent source of vitamin C and also contain many good B vitamins. And you probably won't find a less expensive way to get these vitamins than from low calorie sprouts. Green leafy sprouts are also a good source of vitamin A. Sprouts are a good source of fiber, protein, and contain enzymes that aid digestion. In addition, sprouting destroys the seed's natural preservative enzymes that inhibit digestion.

Different kinds of seeds you can sprout: (This list gives the popularly sprouted seeds and is not all enclusive as you can sprout almost any kind of seed.)

Generally eaten raw: Alfalfa, radish, mung bean, sunflower, clover, cabbage.

Generally cooked: Kidney, Pinto and other miscellaneous beans.

Eaten raw or cooked: Lentils, Soy beans, green peas and wheat. (In addition, all the sprouts that are generally eaten raw can be easily cooked.) Alfalfa: Alfalfa, one of the most popular sprouts, is a good source of vitamins A, B, C, D, E, F, and K and is rich in many minerals, as well as many enzymes needed for digestion.

Radish sprouts are high in vitamin C and potassium and have a rich flavor.

Wheat is high in Vitamins B, C, and E and has three times the vitamin E of dry wheat. Wheat also has many minerals.

Mung Beans: These sprouts should be sprouted under pressure to produce long and juicy sprouts. Mung bean sprouts are an excellent source of protein, vitamin C, A and E, along with many minerals.

Green Pea sprouts are rich in many of the B vitamins and vitamin C. Green pea sprouts make a rich addition to any green salad.

Soybeans: An extremely rich source of protein and vitamins A, B, C and E. Soybeans are rich in minerals and lecithin. They can be sprouted under pressure like mung beans.

Kidney beans, pinto beans and miscellaneous beans: They are a good source of vitamin C, many of the B vitamins and many minerals. Sprouting these beans also changes their indigestible carbohydrates to digestible carbohydrates thereby greatly reducing the intestinal gas they otherwise cause.

Lentils: Rich in protein, vitamin C and the B vitamins. They have a mild ground pepper flavor.

Buckwheat: Makes a great salad green. High in vitamins A, B, C and D.

Sunflower: Rich in vitamins B, D, and E, many minerals, and Linoleic Acid, the W6 EFA.

Do Not eat tomato, peppers or potato sprouts as they are poisonous.

Growing Sprouts:

Sprouts are easy to produce and require no special equipment or knowledge. All that is required to produce sprouts is seeds, moisture, warmth, darkness and maybe 10 minutes of your time every day. Methods vary from high tech production to something as simple as quart jar or a cloth covered pan. Perhaps the simplest method is to take your seeds, place them in a quart jar, and cover them with water to start the process.

Seed amounts to use per quart jar:

1/2 Cup Seeds: Wheat, All Beans, Rye, Oats, Rice, Sunflower, Lentil, Hulled Buckwheat, and Garbanzo Beans.

2 Tablespoons: Alfalfa, radish, clover, cabbage.

Be aware that seeds soak up 2 or 3 times their dry volume in water. After they have absorbed all the water they are going to absorb (2-12 hours depending on the size of the seed), drain the water off, rinse them, and put them in a dark, warm place, with the bottle upside down and tipped up against a corner so water can drip out. Of course, you need to put something under the bottle to catch the dripping water. Use a lid that permits air to move in and out of the jar. You can use a thin cloth, a nylon stocking, or anything you have that's handy. Fasten it down around the opening of the jar using an elastic or bottle ring. After the seeds have stopped draining, if you are sprouting very small seeds like alfalfa, cabbage or radish seeds, roll the bottle, coating the outer wall of the bottle with seeds. Leave the bottle on it's side in the dark. Room temperature is best for growing sprouts, around 70 degrees F. Rinse the seeds twice a day, being sure to drain them well. (Do not neglect to rinse them. They will sour and be useless.) Within two days your seeds should begin sprouting.

For sprouts you are going to cook, let the sprout grow only as long as the seed. For sprouts you will eat raw (except wheat) let them grow up to 2-3 inches. Expose mature alfalfa, wheatgrass, buckwheat or sunflower sprouts to indirect sunlight for 4-5 hours. As they turn dark green their vitamin A content dramatically increases. (This is an important step, for if you don't, your sprouts will have only about 1 percent of this vitamin's RDA. Don't expose bean sprouts to sunlight as this will give them an unpleasant bitter taste.) When your sprouts have grown to the desired length, rinse them again, then put them in a sealed container with something to absorb the water on the bottom and store them in the refrigerator.

Sprouting mung beans under pressure

Place soaked beans in a small colander inside another container. Place several layers of burlap over the top of the seeds, then place a 3-5 pound bag of marbles or small stones on top of this. Water every two or three hours to ensure adequate moisture (this prevents the root systems from over developing in their search for water). Keep them in the dark at all times or they will turn bitter as they begin to green. When they are 2 to 3 inches long, remove them from the colander and refrigerate.

Using your sprouts

After sprouts reach their peak, they immediately begin to loose their vitamin C. Because of this, don't attempt to store sprouts longer than a week. Only grow small quantities of sprouts that can be used in a short period of time. If you plan on getting many of your vitamins from sprouts, it would be a good idea to have one or two small batches of sprouts growing all the time.

Cook sprouted beans using the same recipes you normally use. Sprouted beans cook in 2/3rds the time of unsprouted beans. Heat kills a percentage of the vitamins and enzymes gained by sprouting, so simmer or steam slowly depending on your recipe, and don't cook longer than necessary.

You can sprout a mixture of seeds to make great green salads all by themselves. You can also use raw sprouts in just about anything:

Blended in drinks.

Added to bean or lettuce salads.

Mixed with already cooked breakfast cereals.

Wrapped in tortilla or taco shells and smothered in your favorite sauce.

Added to soups and stews just before eating.

Sprout filled Won Tons.

Put into sandwiches.

Raw sprouts are so versatile that they can also be thrown into just about anything then cooked, such as: Breads and biscuits. Soups. Pancakes. Eggs and omelets. Oatmeal or cracked wheat. Sauces. Mexican or Chinese foods. Potato Patties. Casseroles. Dips. Meatloaf. Any vegetable. Stir fried all by themselves. Even desserts. Really, the sky's the limit.

When cooking sprouts, it is better to steam or stir fry them than to boil them and discard the water. You only lose 20-30 percent of the vitamin C compared to 60 percent.

How much sprouting seed you should store and tips on purchasing.

It is suggested that if you plan to get all your vitamins from sprouts alone, that you store up to 125 lbs of a variety of seeds per year per person. If you have other sources for your vitamins, it is suggested you have 30 lbs of seeds set aside for sprouts to be eaten raw, and 30 lbs of sprouts intended to be cooked per year per person.

Many specialty companies exist that deal exclusively in sprout seed. Usually, these seeds cost several times more than other seeds of the same type. One study shows that mung beans sold exclusively for sprouting cost 4.5 times more than regular mung beans. Yet 99 percent of the time the cheaper seed will sprout and grow as quickly as the more expensive seed. It is the web page author's opinion that it is a waste of money to buy 'sprouting seed' over regular seed. Before purchasing a large amount of storage seed intended for sprouting, purchase a small amount and test it to see if it sprouts well.

Do not attempt to store your sprouting seed for more than 5 years unless it is stored in a cool (at least 60-65 degrees F) dry place. If you are storing large seed, it may be packed in the absence of oxygen. Seed may last up to 15 years stored in this way. As your seeds get old they will take longer to sprout, and you will progressively get more seeds that won't sprout. The key again is rotate, rotate, rotate.

Use several different kinds of sprouts to find what you like before purchasing a large quantity of seed. Do not purchase seeds intended for anything except human consumption. Many seeds processed by farmers and gardeners for planting have been treated with fungicide and or insecticide agents and are very poisonous. These seeds are usually, but not always dyed red. If in doubt, **ask**.