

Amaranth

An excellent grain for breakfast or dinner which is high in protein and very delicious. The grain comes from a group of more than 60 different species of grains that have been cultivated for about 8,000 years. These grains were once considered a staple food in the Inca, Maya and Aztec civilizations. Amaranth is classified as a pseudocereal, meaning that it's not technically a cereal grain like wheat or oats, but it shares a comparable set of nutrients and is used in similar ways. Its earthy, nutty flavor works well in a variety of dishes. Besides being incredibly versatile, this nutritious grain is naturally gluten-free and rich in protein, fiber, micronutrients and antioxidants. This ancient grain is rich in **fiber** and **protein**, as well as many important micronutrients. In particular, amaranth is a good source of manganese, magnesium, phosphorus and iron.

One cup (246 grams) of cooked amaranth contains the following nutrients (2):

- Calories: 251
- Protein: 9.3 grams
- Carbs: 46 grams
- Fat: 5.2 grams
- Manganese: 105% of the RDI
- Magnesium: 40% of the RDI
- Phosphorus: 36% of the RDI
- Iron: 29% of the RDI
- Selenium: 19% of the RDI
- Copper: 18% of the RDI

Amaranth is packed with manganese, exceeding your daily nutrient needs in just one serving. Manganese is especially important for brain function and believed to protect against

certain neurological conditions. It's also rich in magnesium, an essential nutrient involved in nearly 300 reactions in the body, including DNA synthesis and muscle contraction). What's more, amaranth is high in phosphorus, a mineral that is important for bone health. It's also rich in iron, which helps your body produce blood. Amaranth is a good source of fiber, protein, manganese, magnesium, phosphorus and iron, along with several other important micronutrients.

It Contains Antioxidants

Antioxidants are naturally occurring compounds that help protect against harmful free radicals in the body. Free radicals can cause damage to cells and contribute to the development of chronic disease. One review reported that amaranth is especially high in phenolic acids, which are plant compounds that act as antioxidants. These include gallic acid, p-hydroxybenzoic acid and vanillic acid, all of which may help protect against diseases like heart disease and cancer. In one rat study, amaranth was found to increase the activity of certain antioxidants and help protect the liver against alcohol. Antioxidant content is highest in raw amaranth, and studies have found that soaking and processing it may decrease its antioxidant activity).

Further studies are needed to determine how the antioxidants in amaranth may impact humans. Amaranth is high in several antioxidants, such as gallic acid, p-hydroxybenzoic acid and vanillic acid, which may help protect against disease.

Eating Amaranth Could Reduce Inflammation

Inflammation is a normal immune response designed to protect the body against injury and infection.

However, chronic inflammation can contribute to chronic disease and has been associated with conditions like cancer, diabetes and autoimmune disorders. Several studies have found that amaranth could have an anti-inflammatory effect in the body. Similarly, an animal study showed that amaranth helped inhibit the production of immunoglobulin E, a type of antibody involved in allergic inflammation. However, more research is needed to measure the potential anti-inflammatory effects of amaranth in humans.

Amaranth May Lower Cholesterol Levels

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found throughout the body. Too much cholesterol can build up in the blood and cause arteries to narrow. Interestingly, some animal studies have found that amaranth may have cholesterol-lowering properties. One study in hamsters showed that amaranth oil decreased total and “bad” LDL cholesterol by 15% and 22%, respectively. Furthermore, amaranth grain reduced “bad” LDL cholesterol while increasing “good” HDL cholesterol. Additionally, a study in chickens reported that a diet containing amaranth decreased total cholesterol by up to 30% and “bad” LDL cholesterol by up to 70%. Despite these

promising results, additional research is needed to understand how amaranth may affect cholesterol levels in humans. Some animal studies show that amaranth may help reduce levels of total and “bad” LDL cholesterol.

It Could Aid Weight Loss

If you’re looking to shed a few extra pounds, you may want to consider adding amaranth to your diet.

Amaranth is high in [protein](#) and [fiber](#), both of which can aid your weight loss efforts.

In one small study, a high-protein breakfast was found to decrease levels of ghrelin, the hormone that stimulates hunger (Another study in 19 people showed that a high-protein diet was associated with a reduction in appetite and calorie intake. Meanwhile, the fiber in amaranth may move slowly through the gastrointestinal tract undigested, helping promote feelings of fullness. One study followed 252 women for 20 months and found that increased fiber intake was associated with a lower risk of gaining weight and body fat. Still, further research is needed to look at the effects of amaranth on weight loss. To maximize weight loss, be sure to pair amaranth with an overall healthy diet and active lifestyle.

Gluten-Free

Gluten is a type of protein that is found in grains such as wheat, barley, spelt and rye.

For those with [celiac disease](#), eating gluten triggers an immune response in the body, causing damage and inflammation in the digestive tract. Those with [gluten sensitivity](#) may also experience negative symptoms, including diarrhea, bloating and gas. While many of the

most commonly consumed grains contain gluten, amaranth is naturally gluten-free and can be enjoyed by those on a gluten-free diet. Other naturally **gluten-free grains** include sorghum, quinoa, millet, oats, buckwheat and brown rice. Amaranth is a nutritious, gluten-free grain that is a suitable dietary addition for those with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity.

How to Use Amaranth

Amaranth is simple to prepare and can be used in many different dishes.

Before cooking amaranth, you can sprout it by soaking it in water and then allowing the grains to germinate for one to three days.

Sprouting makes grains easier to digest and breaks down **antinutrients**, which can impair mineral absorption. To cook amaranth, combine water with amaranth in a 3:1 ratio. Heat it until it reaches a boil, then reduce the heat and let it simmer for about 20 minutes, until the water is absorbed.

Here are a few easy ways to enjoy this nutritious grain:

- Add amaranth to smoothies to boost the fiber and protein content
- Use it in dishes in place of pasta, rice or couscous
- Mix it into soups or stews to add thickness
- Make it into a breakfast cereal by stirring in fruit, nuts or cinnamon

Amaranth can be sprouted to enhance digestion and mineral absorption. Cooked amaranth can be used in many different dishes.

The Bottom Line

Amaranth is a nutritious, gluten-free grain that provides plenty of fiber, protein and micronutrients.

It has also been associated with a number of health benefits, including reduced inflammation, lower cholesterol levels and increased weight loss.

Best of all, this grain is easy to prepare and can be added to a variety of dishes, making it an excellent addition to your diet.