

What are Bamboo Shoots?

Bamboo is a member of the grass family. Bamboo shoots are young, new canes that are harvested for food before they are two weeks old or one-foot tall. Bamboo shoots are crisp and tender, comparable to asparagus, with a flavor similar to corn. They are used frequently in Asian cuisine. Commercially canned bamboo shoots are common, but fresh, locally grown bamboo has far better flavor and texture.

Storage

Fresh bamboo shoots can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. A bitter taste develops if kept longer than this, or if the shoots are exposed to sunlight. Store whole, unpeeled bamboo shoots in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Fresh shoots can also be cooked then frozen.

Using Bamboo Shoots

Bamboo shoots need to be peeled and cooked before using. Do not eat bamboo shoots raw as they are bitter tasting and can be hard to digest. Trim the roots, peel the outer leaves (sheath leaves), and remove any tough flesh of the shoots before cooking. Tender leaves can be left attached and eaten. The shoots should be cut across the grain into one-eighth inch slices. If very tender, the shoot can be cut into any pattern.

Cook bamboo shoots in boiling water in an uncovered pan for 20 minutes. Leaving the pan uncovered allows the compounds that cause bitterness to dissipate into the air. If there is any bitter taste to the shoots after cooking, boil them in fresh water for 5 more minutes. Bamboo shoots can also be microwaved, in an uncovered shallow pan of water for four minutes. Shoots will still be crisp and crunchy after cooking.

Where to Find Bamboo Shoots

Some farmers in the Pacific Northwest are now growing bamboo for shoots. You can find fresh, locally grown bamboo shoots at early farmers' markets and select stores and restaurants in the spring and early summer, typically May through June. Canned bamboo shoots are available at most grocery stores, and frozen shoots are available at a few stores.

How Nutritious are Bamboo Shoots?

Bamboo shoots are low in fat and calories. One cup of half-inch long slices contains a mere 14 calories and half a gram of fat.

The shoots are a good source of fiber. The same serving size provides about 2.5 grams of fiber; which is approximately 10% of the recommended amount needed in a day. Fiber helps keep cholesterol levels in check and plays a role in preventing colon cancer.

Bamboo shoots are also a good source of potassium – one cup provides 640 milligrams, which is 18% of the daily recommended amount. Potassium is a heart-healthy mineral. It helps to maintain normal blood pressure and a steady heart beat.

When it comes to phytochemicals, natural substances found in plants, bamboo shoots hold promise. They contain lignans and phenolic acids. Lignans, a component of fiber, exhibit a number of important properties that are undergoing research. Lignans appear to have anticancer, antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral activity. Phenolic acids have mild anti-inflammatory properties and are potent antioxidants. Antioxidants help prevent cancer and the blood vessel injury that can start atherosclerosis.

Enjoying Bamboo Shoots

Bamboo shoots must be peeled and boiled for 20 minutes before using. Raw shoots are bitter tasting and can be hard to digest. Here are some ways cooked bamboo can be used.

- Serve as a vegetable side dish with a bit of butter and pepper or soy sauce.
- Add to salads, soups, vegetable combination dishes or stir-fry.
- Stir-fry in a wok and serve with soy sauce and rice.
- Marinate in rice vinegar, sesame oil and soy sauce for several hours.
- Try one of the following delicious recipes

Scalloped Bamboo

3 cups boiled sliced bamboo shoots*
4 tablespoons butter
4 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons grated cheese
Paprika

Place the cooked bamboo in a greased shallow baking dish. In a saucepan, melt the butter on medium heat; stir in flour. Blend in milk and heat to thicken. Stir in cheese and add salt to taste. Pour sauce over the bamboo and bake in an oven at about 350°F for 30 minutes. Serve with paprika sprinkled over the top. (Adapted from *The Book of Bamboo*, David Farrelly, Thames and Hudson, 1984. p. 279)

* See cooking instructions above. Do not use raw bamboo shoots



Enjoying Bamboo Shoots

Evil Jungle Prince with Mixed Vegetables

½ lb mixed vegetables-any variety of the following:

bamboo shoots
baby corn
asparagus
zucchini
tomatoes
bell peppers
water chestnuts
string beans
mushrooms

2 to 6 small red chile peppers
½ stalk fresh lemon grass
2 tablespoons oil
½ cup coconut milk
½ teaspoon salt
10 to 15 basil leaves
1 cup chopped cabbage



Cut mixed vegetables into thin strips. Grind red chili peppers, and lemon grass in a blender or with mortar. Heat oil to medium high and sauté pepper mixture for 3 minutes. Stir in coconut milk and cook for 2 minutes. Add vegetables and cook for 5 more minutes. Stir in basil. Serve on a bed of chopped cabbage. (adapted from *Kosher Thai Recipes* <http://www.kashrus.org>)

For more information about bamboo, visit our web site at <http://agsyst.wsu.edu>/ or contact your local American Bamboo Society chapter, <http://www.americanbamboo.org/> - Membership

Food from the Field

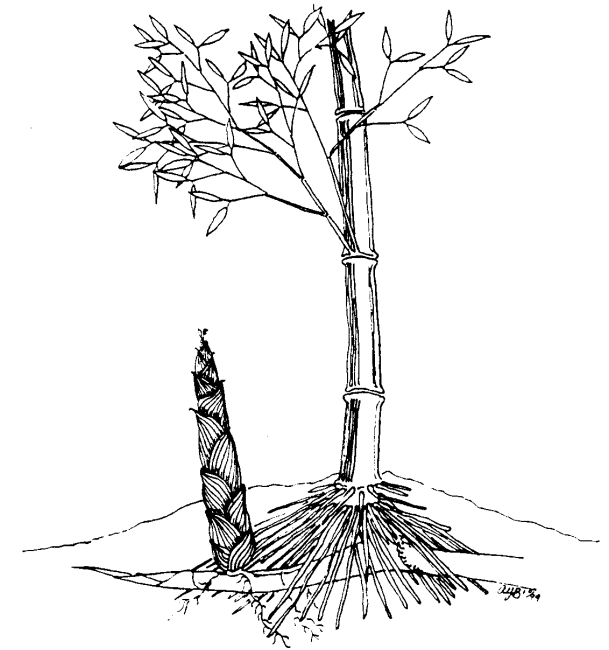
Harvesting fresh bamboo shoots provides an additional crop for farmers to bring to market. When you use fresh bamboo shoots, it not only gives you and your family a new vegetable to enjoy but also supports your local farmer. Buying local produce enhances your community in many ways:

- Keeps small farmers in business and supports the local economy.
- Preserves farmland and open space in your area.
- Conserves natural resources—less fuel used in transportation and packaging.
- Preserves the environment with responsible use of water, fewer farm chemicals, and less air pollution.

If these things are important to you, visit a farmers' market weekly during the growing season. Make a difference with your food dollars!

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Bamboo Shoots

"The best way to control bamboo is to eat it."

—David Fairchild

Food from the Field Series