

What Are the Benefits of Hearts of Palm?

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✓ Fact Checked

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Described as looking a little like asparagus minus the tip, hearts of palm are slightly more delicate but similar in taste to artichoke hearts and have a crunchy texture for culinary versatility
- › Cultivated and consumed by the ancient Mayans who lived in Mesoamerica from around 2600 B.C., hearts of palm can be harvested from several types of palm trees in Florida, Costa Rica and Brazil
- › Hearts of palm are an excellent source of protein and fiber, as well as potassium, vitamins B6 and C, calcium, niacin, phosphorus and zinc
- › Hearts of palm can even make a tasty main course meal, as when they're chopped, they break into shreds that resemble fresh crab meat, and adding the right ingredients can turn them into delicious salads, dips and stir-fries

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Even if you're not a vegetarian, foods that pack a punch in the protein department often earn high marks for people savvy enough to manage their sources through something other than meat. One overlooked source is hearts of palm, which was cultivated and consumed at least as early as the ancient Mayans, who lived in Mesoamerica from around 2600 B.C.

Among other types of palms, one of the sources for this little-known food is a sabal palm, which incidentally is the official state tree of Florida. Other palm trees that

produce them include coconut, acai and palmito, coming from, besides Florida, Costa Rica and Brazil, and the harvesting procedure is labor intensive, which can make them expensive.

However, as Paste Magazine¹ explains, harvesting hearts of palm doesn't require leveling forests since the types of palms that produce them are raised domestically in sustainable farmsteads in Costa Rica. The best part is that once harvested, the plant regenerates for two to three years. Considered a delicacy in some circles, hearts of palm are similar in taste to the artichoke hearts they're often compared to. They're also described as looking a little like asparagus, minus the tips.

These veggies – they can be called veggies since they're plant-derived – can be sliced to make a savory pizza topping as well as a soup or stir fry ingredient and, for all of their mildness, make a fresh, lively tasting salad ingredient. One good combo pairs it with slices of [avocado](#) for an extra punch of protein. Rarely raw, they're usually canned or jarred and placed next to similarly packaged [artichokes](#) on store shelves.

The culinary versatility of “palm hearts” or “cabbage palms” may surprise you. One recipe notes their similarity in texture, when shredded, to crab meat to make “crabless cakes.” Seasoned with Old Bay, homemade mayo and Dijon mustard, they make a delicious main course meal.

Nutritional Profile of Hearts of Palm

Carbs have gotten a bad rap, even being blamed for the obesity epidemic, but you probably already know that not all carbs should be avoided, particularly those from vegetables, including hearts of palm. In hearts of palm, the sugars, in spite of the subtle sweetness you may taste in these veggies, are practically nonexistent. Whatever carbohydrates get broken down into glucose can be used for energy or stored for later use. Livestrong explains:

“A 1-ounce serving of hearts of palm provides 32 calories ... Most of the calories in palm hearts come from carbohydrates. A 1-ounce serving has 7

grams of total carbohydrates, including energy-providing complex carbs and natural sugars.”²

Then there’s vitamin B6, of which a 1-ounce serving of hearts of palm provides 0.23 milligrams (mg), which is rich enough to supply your body with 18% of your Dietary Reference Intake (DRI), the nutritional recommendation put together by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).³ About 100 different enzymes in your body require vitamin B6, Livestrong notes, explaining some of the functions it maintains:

“Some of these jobs include the metabolism of carbohydrates, proteins and fats, as well as the synthesis of hemoglobin. Because of its role making hemoglobin, a deficiency of vitamin B-6 can cause anemia. You also need vitamin B-6 to produce neurotransmitters that help regulate your mood and sleep cycle.”⁴

Another plentiful benefit hearts of palm brings you is 258 mg of potassium, an “essential” nutrient that your body can’t produce on its own.⁵ Potassium alone helps lower your blood pressure by balancing the salt you eat; in fact, both potassium and salt are essential for health and life.

Hearts of palm also provide healthy amounts of vitamins A and E and trace amounts of copper, manganese and selenium. According to the U.S. National Nutrient Database for Standard References,⁶ 1 cup of canned hearts of palm also supplies:

- 11.5 mg of vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant
- 0.638 mg of niacin, aka vitamin B3
- 85 mg of calcium, which strengthens bones
- 95 mg of phosphorus, which helps maintain healthy skeletal bones
- 1.68 mg of zinc, for wound healing and proper thyroid function (more than half what is required for women per day)

Hearts of Palm: The Big Deal About Fiber

According to NutritionValue.org,⁷ hearts of palm consumption constitutes a “very good” source of fiber, which is excellent, because most people in the U.S. barely get even half of what they should. In fiber, a 1-cup serving (146 grams) of hearts of palm provides 14% of the DRI.

Fiber is much more than a nutritional aspect that looms ever larger for people over a certain age. Getting adequate fiber throughout your whole life, even from childhood, helps “train” your body to eliminate waste naturally. When the foods you eat contain adequate fiber, you’re able to make use of the vitamins and minerals from the food you eat and literally flush the rest without the discomfort kids from 1 to 92 experience if they don’t get enough. Mom Junction asserts:

“If fiber intake is less, then constipation is the result. In a society where undue importance in media is given to unhealthy snacks like chips and chocolates, it is vital for a responsible adult to select fiber-rich foods for their family.”⁸

Fiber is much more crucial for health than most people realize and not just for adults. Further, if a food contains 5 grams of fiber or more per serving, it’s considered a high-fiber food, and a good source has between 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber, assuming it’s also nutritious and not grain-based. How much fiber should kids be getting? According to Kids Health:⁹

- Toddlers between 1 and 3 should get 19 grams per day
- Kids between 4 and 8 years of age should get 25 grams per day
- Girls between 9 and 13 should get 26 grams of fiber per day
- Boys between 9 and 13 should get 38 grams of fiber per day

As for adults, my recommendation for daily fiber intake is 25 to 50 grams per 1,000 calories consumed, with vegetables, nuts and seeds making up the most nutritious sources.

Grains, including those in bread, buns, cereals, cookies, muffins and cookies (as well as rice and pasta), are often considered by conventional medicine to be the go-to source of

all things fiber, so it's no mystery as to why many aren't aware there are a whole lot of issues with grains. In 1992, grains were deemed the foundation of the official U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Pyramid, but therein lies the problem. Forbes notes:

"The pyramid essentially dictates how most of us, and our children, eat. But the advice contained in this pyramid is dangerous. It is heavily influenced by corporate lobbyists who care more about the bottom line than your health. Is it any wonder America is so obese and saddled with chronic disease?"¹⁰

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Recipes Featuring Hearts of Palm

One of the best things you can do for your children's health is to serve them vegetables early and often rather than waiting until they're 5 and then suggesting that eating vegetables is good for them! Vegetables are truly at the heart of a good diet. If you want your family to experience the full measure of nutrients for optimal health and vitality, eating hearts of palm in different ways may hit the "sweet spot" to appeal to their (and your) palate.

Versatility, as we discussed previously, is one of the hallmarks of this plant-based food, but the flavor and texture can lend itself to an array of nutritional benefits, and the culinary possibilities may surprise you. Below are three recipes from Food and Wine Blogs to get your creative juices flowing:¹¹

Zesty Hearts of Palm and Avocado Salad

Ingredients

- 1 cup of yellow cherry tomatoes
- 1/2 of a small sweet onion cut into thin slivers

- 2 14-oz. cans of hearts of palm, drained and sliced 1/2-inch thick
- 1 avocado cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1/4 cup flat leaf parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon lime zest, finely grated
- 2 Tablespoons **homemade mayonnaise**
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Procedure

1. In a medium-sized bowl, toss the cherry tomato halves with the sliced onions, hearts of palm slices, avocado and chopped parsley.
2. In a small bowl, whisk the lime juice, olive oil, lime zest and mayo together, and season with salt and pepper.
3. Pour the dressing over the salad ingredients, toss gently and serve immediately.

Quinoa, Artichoke and Hearts of Palm Salad

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups black quinoa (9 oz.), rinsed
- 1/2 lemon
- 3 medium artichokes
- 1/2 cup avocado or extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 4 5-oz. jars of hearts of palm, drained and sliced 1/4-inch thick

- 1 small red bell pepper, diced small
- 1 small yellow bell pepper, diced small
- 6 inner leaves of Boston lettuce

Procedure

1. In a medium saucepan, boil salted water to cook the rinsed quinoa, stirring occasionally until al dente (about 20 minutes). Drain in a fine mesh sieve and spread onto a baking sheet to cool.
2. Squeeze some of the lemon juice into a small bowl of water and set the lemon aside. Snap the outer leaves of each artichoke and use a sharp knife to cut off the leaves. Cut off the stem, peel the bottom and use a spoon to scrape out the furry choke. Rub the lemon all over the artichoke bottoms and drop them in the [lemon water](#).
3. In a small saucepan of salted water, cook the artichoke bottoms over medium-high heat until tender (about 10 minutes). Drain, cool and dice into 1/2-inch pieces.
4. In a large bowl, mix the oil with the vinegar and season with salt and pepper. Add the rest of the ingredients, tossing to coat. Mound the quinoa salad on the lettuce leaves to serve.

Hearts of Palm Salad With Cilantro Vinaigrette

Ingredients

- 2/3 cup cilantro leaves
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped shallot
- 3 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. red wine vinegar

- 2 tsp. honey
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt
- 3 navel oranges
- 2 14-oz. jars of hearts of palm, drained and cut diagonally into 1/2-inch slices.
- 3 bunches of watercress cut into 2-inch lengths, discarding stem bottoms
- 4 cups grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise

Procedure

1. In a blender, combine the first five ingredients and pulse until the cilantro is finely chopped, then add the olive oil in a steady stream to blend smoothly. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Peel the oranges with a sharp knife, removing all the pith. Over a large bowl, cut between the membranes to section, then add the hearts of palm, watercress and tomatoes. Toss gently. Add the vinaigrette and toss to coat. Serve immediately.

Sources and References

- ¹ [Paste Magazine February 5, 2015](#)
- ^{2, 4} [Livestrong October 3, 2017](#)
- ³ [NIH](#)
- ⁵ [USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Bananas](#)
- ⁶ [USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Release 28](#)
- ⁷ [NutritionValue.org](#)
- ⁸ [Mom Junction June 28, 2017](#)
- ⁹ [KidsHealth September 2014](#)
- ¹⁰ [Forbes November 2, 2016](#)
- ¹¹ [Food & Wine August 20, 2015](#)