# Great Reasons to Eat More Sprouts

**By Dr. Mercola**

One of the most effective ways to achieve optimal health is to eat plenty of whole, organically-grown foods, and sprouts may offer some of the highest levels of nutrition.

Best of all, you can easily and inexpensively grow sprouts at home. They're a particularly excellent choice during winter months, when outdoor gardening is limited or ruled out. Another major benefit is that you don't have to cook them.

If you aren't already gardening, they are a terrific way to get your toe in the water and start to experiment with the joy of growing your own food. The beautiful thing about sprouts, unlike gardening, is that you can harvest your food within about a week of starting the process.

They are eaten raw, usually as an addition to salad or juice. What exactly are "sprouts," and what makes them so nutritious? As explained by The World's Healthiest Food:

*"[M]any of the foods we eat begin their plant life as sprouts."Sprouting" is simply the way that a seed cracks open for the first time and sends a root or a leaf stalk poking upward out of the soil and into the open air. Because the sprouting stage of growth is so unique in the life of a plant, there has been special interest in potential health benefits that might be associated with this stage of growth. In general, sprouts are often more concentrated in certain nutrients-including some key antioxidants-when compared with fully mature plants."*

**Sprouts — Potent Nutrition Delivered in 'Small Packages'**

Indeed, sprouts may be small, but they are *packed*with nutrition, including vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and enzymes that help protect against free radical damage. [Watercress](http://foodfacts.mercola.com/watercress.html), for example, is an absolute powerhouse of nutrition. It may actually be *the* most nutrient-dense vegetable out there.

Based on 17 nutrients — including potassium, fiber, protein, calcium, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folate, zinc, and vitamins A, B6, B12, C, D, E, and K — watercress scored a perfect 100 in a recent study titled, "Defining Powerhouse Fruits and Vegetables: A Nutrient Density Approach."

Two of my personal favorites are sunflower seed and pea shoots—both of which are typically about 30 times more nutritious than organic vegetables. They're also among the highest in protein. In addition, sunflower seeds contain healthy fats, essential fatty acids, and fiber — all of which are important for optimal health.

I typically have three trays of sunflower sprouts growing whenever I'm not travelling and usually eat them nearly every day when I'm at home. Other commonly sprouted beans, nuts, seeds, and grains include:

* [**Alfalfa**](http://articles.mercola.com/herbs-spices/alfalfa.aspx)**:** a good source of vitamins A, B, C, D, E, F, and K
* [**Wheatgrass**](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2013/05/20/wheatgrass.aspx)**:** high in vitamins B, C, E, and many minerals
* **Mung bean**: good source of protein, fiber, and vitamins C and A
* **Lentil sprouts:** contain 26% protein and can be eaten without cooking
* [**Brussels sprouts**](http://foodfacts.mercola.com/brussels-sprouts.html)**:** One cup of cooked Brussels sprouts contains just 56 calories but is packed with more than 240% of the recommended daily amount (RDA) for vitamin K1, and nearly 130% of the RDA for vitamin C. Plus, Brussels sprouts are a good source of fiber, manganese, potassium, choline, B vitamins, antioxidants, and other health-promoting phytochemicals

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Many of the benefits of sprouts related to the fact that, in their initial phase of growth, the plants contain more *concentrated* amounts of nutrients. As a result, you need to eat far less sprouts, in terms of amount, compared to a mature plant. For example, when sprouting seeds, nuts, beans, and grains you get:

* **Higher vitamin content.**In some seeds, the vitamin content is increased by as much as 20 times during the sprouting process. Some go even higher. The B1 in mung beans, for example, increases by 285% when sprouted; B2 go up by 515%; and B3 (niacin) by 256%.
* **Higher enzyme content.** Sprouts contain an estimated *100 times* more enzymes than fresh fruits and vegetables. These enzymes allow your body to extract higher levels of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients from *other*foods you eat in conjunction with the sprouts as well.
* **Increased essential fatty acid and fiber content.**The essential fatty acid and fiber content also increases dramatically during the sprouting process. Most people do not get enough fiber or healthy fats in their diet for optimal health, and sprouts can be a great source of both.
* **Increased bioavailability of minerals and protein.**When the seed starts to sprout, minerals such as calcium and magnesium bind to proteins in the seed, which makes both the minerals and the protein more readily available and usable in your body. In addition, the proteins are altered in beneficial ways during the process of sprouting, so you get more, and higher quality, protein from sprouts compared to eating the unsprouted seed.

Besides their superior nutritional benefits, sprouts are also the ultimate in home-grown foods. When you grow them yourself, provided you're using organic seeds, nuts, beans, and grains, you can be sure you're not exposing yourself and your family to harmful pesticides and other chemicals.

Sprouts are also among the least expensive foods you can buy or grow. Many say they cannot afford to eat healthy, but sprouts are so inexpensive, there's really no excuse for avoiding them — especially if you grow them yourself. Doing so can cut the cost by about 90% or more, compared to buying them.

**Growing Your Own Sprouts Is Quick, Easy, and Cost-Effective**

Growing your own [sprouts](http://products.mercola.com/sprouting-seeds/) is quite easy, and you don't need a whole lot of space either. You can find instructions on how to sprout different kinds of nuts, seeds, beans, and grains on RawFoods-LivingFoods.com. OrganicAuthority.com also offers a simple five-step protocol for sprouting using Mason or Ball jars.

I used Ball jars when I first started sprouting seeds about 25 years ago, but I've since switched over to growing them in potting soil. With Ball jars you need to rinse them several times a day to prevent mold growth and it is a hassle to have them draining in the sink, taking up space.

Moreover, you need *dozens* of jars to produce the same amount of sprouts as just one flat tray. I didn't have the time or patience for that, and you may not either. The choice is yours though. You can easily grow sprouts and shoots with or without soil. My [Sprout Doctor Starter Kit](http://products.mercola.com/sprouting-seeds/#sprouting) comes with what I consider to be three of the best sprouts to grow – sunflower shoots, broccoli sprouts, and pea shoots. When grown in soil, you can harvest your sprouts in about a week, and a pound of seeds will probably produce over 10 pounds of sprouts.

Sunflower shoots will give you the most volume for your effort and, in my opinion, have the best taste. In one 10x10 tray, you can harvest between one and two pounds of sunflower sprouts, which will last you about three days. You can store them in the fridge for about a week. Broccoli sprouts look and taste similar to alfalfa sprouts, which most people like. They're perfect for adding to salads and sandwiches, and are especially tasty in combination with fresh avocado.

I've partnered with a company in a small town in Vermont that develops, breeds, and grows their own seeds, and are industry leaders in seed safety for sprouts and shoots. All of my seeds are non-GMO, certified organic, and packed with nutrition. My [starter kit](http://products.mercola.com/sprouting-seeds/#sprouting) makes it easy to grow your own sprouts in the comfort of your home, whenever you want. It provides everything you need, so all you have to do is grow and enjoy your sprouts. You can use them in salad, either in addition to or in lieu of salad greens, or add them to your vegetable juice or smoothies.

**Adding Sprouts is a Simple Way to Bolster Your Nutrition**

If you want to learn even more about what's in the food you're eating, along with helpful recipes, visit our [Food Facts library](http://foodfacts.mercola.com/). Most people are not aware of the wealth of nutrients available in whole foods, particularly organic fruits and vegetables. By getting to know your food, you can make informed decisions about how to eat healthier. And when you consider the amount of nutrients you can get from fresh sprouts, combined with their cost-effectiveness, adding more sprouts to your diet is really a no-brainer.

Again, sprouts allow you to get the most benefit out of a plant in the most biologically concentrated form. When you sprout foods, you increase proteolytic enzymes that make both carbohydrates and proteins digestible. And while your body produces [proteolytic enzymes](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2011/08/21/enzymes-special-report.aspx) when you eat foods that don't contain digestive enzymes, your body is forced to manufacture them (instead of making enzymes it *should* be making). After a while, your body's ability to produce the right enzymes wanes along with its ability to fight off disease. Enzymes from sprouted foods can help replace those your body no longer produces.