

Sprouting

Sprouting—the transitional stage between seed and plant—is the practice of soaking, draining, and then rinsing seeds, legumes, and pseudograins at regular intervals until they germinate, or sprout. It's a little like kitchen science, so it brings some serious fun and reward to your kitchen routine. Sprouts are rich in fiber, digestible energy, bio-available vitamins, minerals, amino acids, proteins, health-promoting enzymes, and phytochemicals. These nutrients are contained in the seed and remain inactive until sprouting, when enzymes convert them into the food a baby plant needs to grow quickly. These activated nutrients are also essential for human health. Sprouts are not only fresh, cleansing, alive nutritional powerhouses, but they are inexpensive to produce. They're also considered to be a pre-digested food since the enzymes in the seed have done most of the work of breaking down nutritional complexities.

Sprouting is easier than you think, and in most cases, we don't need any fancy gadgetry like sprouting jars or trays to get going (unless we're soil-sprouting, which I won't discuss here since it's more involved). We just need a glass bowl, a glass jar, and a cheesecloth to easily sprout at home.

It's important to discuss that there are varying opinions about sprouts and toxicity out there, but concerns primarily involve commercially grown sprouts. So, if buying sprouts, buy organic. It's also important to note that we should never eat sprouted, raw kidney beans. They're high in lectins, another antinutrient that protects the plant and harms humans, in this case, by attacking the cells in our stomach lining, which can result in diarrhea and vomiting. Soaking and cooking eliminates these lectins, so you can enjoy kidney beans, just never raw sprouted.² Follow the recommendations in the "Sproutables to Try" list, since certain sprouts take longer to reduce antinutrient content like lectins, enzyme inhibitors, and phytic acids. We can absolutely cook sprouts into soups, one-pot meals, etc. Just know that heat will diminish some of the nutrient benefits.

Mung Bean Sprouts



DAY 1

Follow the steps for soaking, making sure to soak for the entire recommended time(s).



Red Quinoa (beginning to sprout)

DAY 2

Transfer soaked, rinsed, and well-drained "sproutables" to a glass bowl or large glass jar and secure the top with a cheesecloth and a rubber band. Place in a room-temperature location, away from direct sunlight.



Buckwheat Sprouts

DAY 3

You may see some tails on "sproutables" at this point. If so, "harvest" them by giving them a taste. If they are sweet and crunchy and to your liking, rinse, draining them well and transferring to the fridge in their glass container secured with a cheesecloth. The cool temperature will slow the sprouting process but not stop it, so don't be surprised if sprout tails continue to grow. Sprinkle them into soups or salads or eat them by the handful. The shorter the tail, the sweeter the sprout. If there aren't tails at all, rinse, drain, and let them sit on the counter for another day. You can keep the sprouts in your jar, filling with water through the cheesecloth. Making sure your rubberband is secure, simply turn jar upside down to drain. Then, flip back over—you're basically just giving your baby sprouts a quick drink.

DAY 4-8

Follow Day 3's steps every day until sprouts are ready to harvest—use your tastebuds to decide. The longer the tails, the less sweet the sprout.



Lentil Sprouts

You can keep your jar upside down for a few minutes to drain. Just make sure it's on a surface that isn't completely flat (try a plate). You want air to circulate through the cheesecloth at all times, and a place for liquid to escape to.

Sproutables to Try

I have found the following to be the tastiest sprouts enjoyed plain and added to recipes, salads, wraps, and soups. They are also the most foolproof to sprout. Visit YumUniverse.com for helpful sprouting how-to videos.

Buckwheat

Rinse often as buckwheat, like chia, will take on a gelatinous coating.

Start with: ½ cup dry, hulled buckwheat groats yields ½ – ¾ cup sprouted

Sprout time post-soak: 1–2 days

Taste & Texture: nutty, plump, tender

Lentils

Start with: ½ cup dry lentils yields 1–2 cups sprouted

Sprout time post-soak: 4 days

Taste & Texture: sweet, crunchy, a tad earthy

Mung Beans

Start with: ½ cup dry mung beans yields 1–2 cups sprouted

Sprout time post-soak: 4 days

Taste & Texture: sweet, earthy, crunchy