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From the Ocean to the Table

More than just a slimy ocean weed, sea vegetables are a wonderful food. There are many varieties that are widely available, all with different flavors and textures. Better yet, these vegetables are very nutritionally dense foods.

Because they are constantly bathing in the ocean, sea vegetables are very high in trace minerals. In fact, no other food is as rich a source of the minerals that are essential for good health. Many are also great sources of chlorophyll. They also are one of the only plant sources of vitamin B12, a commonly low nutrient in vegan diets. Dark green sea vegetables contain sodium alginate, a compound that is able to attach to heavy metals and drag them out of the body. Canadian researchers have also shown that sodium alginate can help remove radiation from the body.

A great sea vegetable to always have on hand is kombu. Kombu is one of the ingredients in traditional dashi. Dashi is a simple stock used to make Japanese soups. Kombu is a source of glutamic acid which helps tenderize beans. Many people find the final product to be much less gas producing when they add a stick of kombu to beans while they simmer. Kombu is very high in iodine, a mineral that is important for thyroid function as well.



Dulse is a red seaweed that is harvested in northern oceans. It has a very distinct briny flavor and a wonderful

chewy texture. Dulse can be found as a powder or dried whole. The powder is useful for adding a fishy quality to vegetarian dishes. By adding some dulse and a small amount of sweetener to soy sauce one can create something quite similar to fish sauce.

Hijiki is a brown algae that is primarily harvested in Japan. Some feel that it has a slight licorice accent beneath its sea vegetable flavor. It is great added to soups and stir fries, because it maintains its texture quite well when heated.

Make sure to soak it first because it absorbs a lot of water. Although all sea vegetables are high in calcium, hijiki is the highest.

Nori, also known as laver, is probably the most famous sea vegetable because of its use to make the papers that wrap sushi rolls. It is also sometimes available whole. Believe it or not, the harvesting, drying and selling of nori is a 2 billion dollar a year industry! In Great Britain nori is baked into breads that are called Laver breads. It is a little sweeter than any of the other sea vegetables and is the highest in protein.

Agar Agar is an extract from certain sea vegetables that is useful as a thickening agent. It can be used as a replacement for gelatin in many recipes. This is nice for those that want to abstain from gelatin (which comes from beef or pork).

If you don't want to eat sea vegetables, but would still like to benefit from them you might want to try bathing in them. Have you ever noticed how nice your skin feels after you swim in the ocean? This is partly because the ocean is so mineral dense. One can buy expensive bath salts, or, if brave enough, go down to the beach with a bucket, wade out into the waves and bring home a variety of seaweeds. Place them in a warm bath and jump in! Honestly it is wonderful. The bath water turns a wonderful green emerald color and the sea vegetables almost glow.

The Educated Vegetable uses a lot of seaweed. If you want to learn more about sea vegetables or are in need of a sea vegetable refresher course in the kitchen contact The Educated Vegetable for a consultation or a private cooking class.



Life after Coffee

“I can’t start my day without a cup of coffee.” So many people say this when asked about why they drink coffee. Other people love the taste. Others just want something warm in the morning and don’t know what else to drink. Believe it or not, coffee is pretty hard on the human body. It is a very concentrated source of caffeine which is a powerful central nervous system stimulant. Also because of the roasting process it is extremely acidic. Roasting the coffee essentially chars the beans, not much unlike charring things on a BBQ. New studies have shown that charred food is carcinogenic. Worse yet, most people “doctor” their coffee with large amounts of sugar and commercially produced cream; two products that are hard on the system. Basically most Americans start their day out by ingesting a cancer causing beverage that also sends a jolt through their central nervous system accompanied by acidifying their blood (when the body is acidic it is much more susceptible to infection), and burden their liver and pancreas with the task of metabolizing highly processed sugars and fats. Don’t get me wrong, there are worse guilty pleasures out there, but really, isn’t their a better way to start the day?

There are some alternatives to coffee that many people around the world enjoy on a daily basis. These other options are not perfect, but they seem to have more redeemable qualities than coffee, and believe it or not, can be quite tasty. Have you ever had a properly brewed cup of Japanese green tea “doctored” with a few drops of agave nectar? No, well how about spiced chai with soy milk and some maple syrup? The flavors that are possible are truly wonderful and for some, as comforting as a warm cup of joe.

Green tea (fresh leaves are pictured to the right) is getting a large amount of press these days. Just about everyone has heard about its high level of antioxidant activity. Some also may have heard that it has the ability to increase metabolism thus acting as a weight loss aid. It has also been shown to ward off



cancer in the body. The compounds responsible for all of these amazing effects are called catechin polyphenols. The ones specific to green tea are actually quite similar to resveratrol, the polyphenol in red wine that seems to be responsible for the “French Paradox”. Green Tea does have a small amount of caffeine in it; about 1/6 the caffeine of a cup of coffee.

There are many varieties of green tea available. Jasmine blends are popular. The leaves are blended with jasmine flowers which produces a cup with a very floral aroma. Traditional Japanese green teas like Sencha have more of a grassy flavor. Another interesting variety is Gen Mai Cha. This is actually a blend of green tea and toasted rice kernels. The resulting cup has a great nutty flavor. For a perfect cup of green tea use filtered water heated to just below a boil (~190 degrees). Let the tea steep for 2-4 minutes. If it steeps much more than that, the final product will have a bitter quality.

Yerba Mate (pictured to the right) is a little less popular but none the less, a very interesting beverage. The tea is very popular in South America. It has been reported by some to have an even higher antioxidant activity than green tea. Also, this is a great beverage for people with allergies. Yerba mate is a source of mateine, a chemical cousin to caffeine which stimulates the relaxation of smooth muscles thus relaxing the effects of an allergy attack.



A good friend recently tried out yerba mate to soothe his seasonal allergies and said it worked better than Claritan! Like caffeine, mateine is a stimulant, but seems to be totally non habit forming. Many people report the “buzz” as being cleaner and lighter. Yerba mate is vitamin packed and is a great source of selenium, which is critical to the bodies production of enzymes that protect against free radical damage and the production of thyroid hormone. Like green tea, yerba mate should be brewed with water just below the boiling point.

In India, chai simply means tea, almost always black tea, with some milk and a whole lot of sugar. Masala chai is the same thing but with spices added. It is these spices which can really make masala chai a health promoting beverage. Many of the spices traditionally used for masala chai are warming to the system and assist digestion. Also, many boost the immune systems function.

Black tea comes from the same plant as green tea, but the leaves are lightly roasted or smoked. This process makes the tea less health promoting. If black tea doesn’t agree with ones system try making masala chai with only spices. Believe it or not, this can be extremely tasty especially with the addition of tasty unorthodox additions (like the recipe below). I like chai with a touch of soy milk. If one can afford it, raw milk or raw cream are excellent choices as well. Forget white sugar. Try sweetening chai with maple syrup or rapadura (whole unrefined sugar cane).

Educated Chai

- 1 tbsp fresh ginger root
- 10 peppercorns
- 2 whole cinnamon sticks
- 10 whole cloves
- 6 green cardamom pods
- 4 whole star anise
- 1/4 cup dandelion root
- 1 tbsp Siberian ginseng
- 3 cups water
- 1 cup soy milk
- 2 tbsp maple syrup



In a large saucepan, bring all ingredients to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Simmer for at least 10 minutes then serve.

Makes 6 average size cups of tea.