

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**Aug 2021 Zucchini**



**Zucchini: Versitile and Delicious**

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Zucchini, also called *courgetti,* is a member of the gourd family. Although it is a variety of summer squash, it is widely available year-round. Zucchini is botanically categorized as a fruit because it contains seeds inside but are generally considered vegetables in the culinary world. They can be found in several colors from yellow, light green to dark green and have a soft, buttery interior. Similarly shaped to cucumbers, they have a subtle taste, making them easy to incorporate into many dishes.

Zucchini is very low in calories due to a high-water content. Zucchini is 94% water and is often promoted to aid in weight loss as it can be filling without adding excess calories. They contain essential B vitamins including riboflavin, thiamin, niacin, and B6. Squash is a good source of dietary fiber. Increasing fiber can improve digestion and reduce constipation and other digestive issues.

Zucchini is rich in minerals including potassium which helps maintain normal blood pressure. Magnesium regulates protein synthesis and nerve function, blood glucose control and blood pressure. It is required for DNA synthesis and energy production. Calcium maintains muscle contraction and supports healthy bones and teeth. Phosphorus is also a component of bones and teeth and is important for gene expression and energy production.

Zucchini is a good source of health-promoting antioxidants including vitamin C which helps to form collagen to hold tissues, muscles and bones together. It protects us from infection and bruising, and helps the body absorb iron and folate. Like all antioxidants, it protects against cell damage. Zeaxanthin and lutein fight free radicals reducing age-related eye conditions like cataracts and glaucoma. Beta-carotene, a plant pigment, is converted to vitamin A which fights aging and disease. Eating zucchini can also help maintain healthy cholesterol levels. The beta-carotene and vitamin C can help prevent the oxidation of cholesterol.

Eating zucchini can also help maintain healthy cholesterol levels. The beta-carotene and vitamin C both work to prevent the oxidation of cholesterol which lowers development of arterial plaque.

The zucchini growing season in the US peaks between May and July. When selecting zucchini, pick squash that are approximately 6 inches in length and 1-2 inches in diameter. Larger zucchinis tend to be more bitter and fibrous. Look for sleek, smooth, non-blemished squash that is bright in color. When preparing, keep in mind everything but the stem is edible. Leaving the peel on provides additional fiber benefits.

Avoid washing or cutting your zucchini until ready for use. Store uncut zucchini in a perforated plastic bag in the refrigerator drawer. This method will keep your uncut zucchini fresh for up to 2 weeks. Once cut, use within 2-4 days.

Zucchini can be consumed raw or cooked. Use raw slices on sandwiches, cube or shred for fresh salads, or slice for use with hummus or dip. Make zucchini noodles, or *zoodles*, by using a spiralizer or a julienne peeler. Use zoodles instead of pasta noodles to increase vegetables in your diet. To cook zucchini, chop into quarters and sauté in a pan on the stove, roast with salt and pepper, or arrange slices in a single layer on a baking sheet to make chips. Try making zucchini bread the whole family will enjoy. Summer is a great time to introduce zucchini into every meal.