

Sprout Magic

In the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Jack's magic beans grew into a giant beanstalk that enabled him to climb to the kingdom of the wicked giant and take back the things the giant had stolen from his family.

Though this is a fairytale, there are “magic beans” today! Yes, you read that right. They probably won't allow you to climb a giant beanstalk, but when you add water and let them grow, some amazing things happen. They substantially increase in nutrients. They become a vegetable rather than just a legume, and they are easier to digest. They enlarge so your food source increases in volume, and they cook in less time or can be eaten without cooking them which helps conserve fuel. All of these things are wonderful for a situation where you must rely on food storage. I honestly don't know how one little seed is able to do all of these things with just water, but they do, and that to me is magic by divine design!

In the summer it may be possible for you to grow fresh produce, but in the winter, if there is no store and no electric lighting, what then? If you skip fresh fruits and vegetables even for a few months, you can develop diseases that come from malnutrition. The best answer for getting fresh foods and staying healthy is to sprout the grains, seeds, and legumes that are conducive to this.

How to sprout

Make sure that all items used in sprouting are clean (including your hands). Commercially-sold sprouters are nice, but not necessary—you can use a glass jar. You can buy a special lid or screen to cover the mouth, or you can use a small piece of cotton cloth you hold on with a rubber band. The jar should be big enough to hold one part beans or seeds and 4–5 parts water. It should have a wide enough mouth that it will be easy to dump or pull the sprouts out (not like a glass pop bottle). For a little packet of beans (3 Tbsp.) a quart jar is very adequate.

1. Sort (taking out any that are broken), rinse and drain the beans (or other seeds).
2. Soak them. The bigger the seed, the longer it should soak (8–12 hours).
3. Drain the water off and rinse well. Then drain well again. (After the initial soak, if the beans are sitting in water they will rot.) Cover with a cloth held on with a rubber band and place in a position to drain well (like upside down over a bowl or colander).
4. Repeat the rinse and drain each morning and night until the little root or “tail” on the seeds is at least as long as the seed itself. *You can go a day or two more, but don't let them go too long because sprouts can mold or grow bacteria if you do. (The exception would be things like alfalfa and pea shoots, which need a sprouting tray and grow upwards until they have a second set of green leaves).

Rinse well before eating. Store in the fridge up to 12 days, but still rinsing twice a day. *If grains start to mold while sprouting or storing, discard them immediately and sterilize the container. I have had this happen once or twice over many years. It can ruin a mesh sprouter. It usually happens when seeds are irradiated, heated, or the germ has been killed another way. Sometimes it happens if the seeds sit in water.

What Can You Sprout?

Surprisingly, not all beans or seeds are good for sprouting, especially for raw eating. Kidney beans, lima beans, and fava beans all increase in nutrition, but they still need to be cooked well before you eat them. Here is a list of some of the things that are best for sprouting:

- Mung beans
- Adzuki beans
- Lentils (not hulled)
- Whole peas
- Chick peas
- Wheat (especially red)
- Almonds & Peanuts
- Quinoa & Millet
- Barley
- Sorghum
- Rye
- Brown rice

- Oats
- Alfalfa seed
- Radish seed
- Broccoli seed
- Onion seed
- Cress seed

Using Sprouts

Use them like a vegetable. If you rinse sprouts well and they have no mold, you can eat them raw (not recommended if pregnant) in salads or on sandwiches. You can also add them to soups or just lightly stir-fry them. Some of the current research shows that grains gain nutrition and become more digestible and ready for your body to use more efficiently (without negative affects) if they are sprouted before use. Yes, you can even make bread from sprouted grains.

***Special Note**—The foods you have in buckets and #10 cans that have the air removed with an oxygen absorber, dry ice, or vacuum seal will lose their ability to sprout as the absence of oxygen will eventually kill the germ. If you want to store sproutable grain, the best way to pack it is with food grade diatomaceous earth. Alpine Food Storage does sell this at the best price I have seen. This will keep it pest free and alive. It is safe to eat, but will rinse off in the sprouting process. It is actually a safe and healthy way to store.

Resources

If you have no other source of fresh produce, you will actually need to know how to sprout in a long-term emergency. You will want at least 2½–5 gallons per adult of sproutable beans and other seeds. You can find some of these at Good Earth, WinCo, and Alpine Food Storage. I am finding that I love working with lentils perhaps the most even though they haven't been high on my list to cook with in the past. However, it is hard to get sproutable seeds in large quantities. Here are two of my favorite resources: www.sproutpeople.org (lots of good information and recipes) and www.mountainvalleyseed.com (sells sprout seed in bulk, but pricey).

When Sprouting Isn't Good

Sprouts require rinsing in clean water two to three times a day. If the water source is scarce or compromised, or if the cleanliness of jars and cloth or other utensils is uncertain, sprouting is not a good idea because bacteria can grow as the seeds grow.

Lentils are easier to sprout and to digest than beans, so they are a good thing to start with. If anyone in your family has a problem with gas or nausea after eating bean sprouts they may be sensitive to lectin, a toxin that beans contain (which mostly dissipates during sprouting and cooking). In this case, their beans should be cooked and consumption limited.