

by **BERKELEY WELLNESS**

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is believed to have originated in southern Asia, where it has long been valued for its purported medicinal properties and varied culinary uses. The ginger plant is currently grown in Asia, the East Indies, Mexico, Jamaica, and Africa. The ginger we eat is the plant's rhizome, an underground stem often incorrectly referred to as a root.

Ginger, along with other pungent spices, was used in medieval European cookery as a preservative, and it doubled as a method of camouflaging meat that was old or bad. The Spanish explorers brought ginger from the East Indies into Spain in the 16th century, where it was considered a delicacy and sold in various parts of Europe. Second to pepper, ginger was the most traded commodity in Europe. Considered to be one of the world's favorite spices, it continues to enjoy worldwide popularity.

Ginger: nutrition

The nutrients in ginger are insignificant given the small quantities of ginger usually consumed, though there is some potassium.

For a full listing of nutrients, see [Ginger](#) in the National Nutrient Database.

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Although ginger has a reputation as a folk medicine cure for nausea, there is no scientific evidence to support its effectiveness. However, it's harmless in small doses, and it may have a [placebo effect](#)—that is, it may make you feel better because you think it will help.

Types of ginger

- **Mature ginger:** This is what most people know as ginger. The skin is thin, light brown, and papery. Mature ginger is more fibrous and stronger in flavor than young ginger.
- **Young ginger:** Sometimes called spring ginger, this looks like the ginger everyone is used to seeing, but the skin is very thin and pale, and needs no peeling. Very tender, not fibrous, and milder in flavor than mature ginger, it is generally available in Asian markets in the springtime.

Other ginger products include:

- **Crystallized ginger (candied ginger):** Slices of peeled young ginger are cooked in sugar syrup until they've crystallized and are then coated in coarse sugar. This sweet-spicy form of ginger is sold as slices or chunks. Both make a great addition to baked goods, fruit, salads, and desserts.
- **Ginger juice:** Fresh ginger is grated and squeezed to extract its juice. The juice is then packed in bottles along with citric acid and xanthan gum to preserve its flavor. Use ginger juice in baked goods, stir-fries, salad dressings, sauces, marinades, and drinks.
- **Ground ginger:** Fresh ginger is dried and then ground to a powder. This is commonly used in baking, but it can be used to add a very distinctive heat to savory dishes as well. It cannot, however, be substituted for fresh ginger.
- **Preserved ginger:** Thick slices of peeled ginger are packed in a sugar-salt mixture, where they eventually turn translucent. They are traditionally stored and sold in "ginger jars."
- **Red candied ginger:** Slices of ginger are packed in a sweet sugar syrup that's been tinted red with food coloring.
- **Sushi ginger:** Thin slices of young ginger are pickled in a mixture of vinegar, sugar, and water. Called gari in Japanese, this and wasabi are the traditional accompaniment to sushi and sashimi. Although you can get white sushi ginger, it is more commonly tinted a light pink.



How to Cook with Ginger

One of the best known uses for ginger is in gingerbread cookies, including [gingerbread men](#), which date back to the 16th century. (Queen Elizabeth I of England is rumored to have invented them to amuse her guests.) But there are many other ways to use [ginger](#), which imparts a piquant, stimulating flavor to an endless variety of dishes, from baked goods to curries to salads.

How to buy, store, and cook with ginger

When shopping for fresh, mature ginger, look for knobs with plump, smooth, somewhat shiny skin. If it's wrinkled or cracked, the ginger is past its prime. While older ginger is still usable, it won't be as flavorful or as pungent. Shop for ground

ginger and other forms of processed ginger in a store that has a rapid turnover and stores the products out of the heat or sunlight.

Fresh ginger should be stored in the refrigerator. If you've bought more than you can use within a couple of weeks, slice what's left and place it in a jar of vinegar. Though the ginger will have lost some of its flavor, as it leaches into the vinegar it can still be used in stir-fries. It will have a bit of a pickled taste. Meanwhile, the vinegar will have a pronounced ginger flavor and can be used in salad dressings, sauces, and marinades.

If the skin is thin, it is not necessary to peel fresh ginger before grating, slicing, mincing, or shredding. If the skin is thick, however, it is preferable to peel it first. A sharp paring knife is the best tool to use for navigating around all the knobs and bumps.

To juice fresh ginger, grate it, peeled or unpeeled, on the fine holes of a box grater or on a special grater made just for ginger. Grate the ginger into a bowl, and then squeeze the pulp to extract as much of the spicy juice as possible. Discard the pulp.

10 ginger recipe ideas

1. Add slices of peeled fresh ginger to stews.
2. Add minced ginger to homemade or store-bought [barbecue sauce](#).
3. Make a [ginger-carrot soup](#) for a spicy and hearty lunch.
4. Whisk ginger juice together with soy sauce and dark sesame oil to make an [Asian-inspired salad dressing](#).
5. Add chopped crystallized ginger to a bean and avocado salad on fresh greens.
6. Add ginger juice to lemonade or limeade.
7. [Grate ginger into a curry](#) for a fresh and zesty bite.
8. Add grated fresh ginger to a gingerbread recipe.
9. Sprinkle minced crystallized ginger over fresh fruit.
10. Stir grated ginger or ginger juice into your favorite jam or jelly to spice it up.

Also see these recipes: [Cranberry-Ginger Tea Bread](#) and [Ginger-Grilled Sirloin Salad](#).

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