

Chia Seeds: Testing the Limits of the Latest Superfood

Alisa Fleming, Go Dairy Free ~ As reported earlier this week, Natural Products Expo West 2008 was abuzz with new-to-market superfoods. Yet one in particular has garnered a great deal of curiosity for its nutritional merit, incredible versatility, and unique modern history. Decades ago I recall sitting in front of the TV, listening to ch-ch-ch-chia pet jingle that still rings clearly in my head. In the 70's that little wonder plant captured the attention of millions, but now it is the seeds that we are enthralled with … and for good reason ...

Though it is relatively new to the United States for general consumption, the chia seed has solid roots in Mexico and South America. Chia seeds boast a good ratio of protein (20%) and fiber (25%), a higher concentration of those wonderful Omega-3's (64% - even outshining the average flax seed), significant levels of antioxidants, and a great “free-from” profile (including no gluten).

But what does one do with these miniscule little seeds? Amazingly, the chia seed is one of the most versatile foods that our test kitchen has ever come across. It worked marvelously as an egg replacer in our first recipe creation, Banana Chia Muffins. But the real test came with the second recipe. Hannah Kaminsky, author of the popular dessert cookbook *My Sweet Vegan*, pushed the limits by using chia seeds in place of eggs in a Clafouti. We were skeptical, since this traditional French dessert is quite dependent on dairy and eggs. Yet, to everyone's surprise the vegan, chia-based Clafouti performed perfectly, and was positively delicious … devoured in a matter of minutes.

Chia seeds are also excellent in raw food dishes, and unlike nuts and grains, they require very little soaking time. Within a matter of minutes, whole chia seeds soften to a very edible consistency, plus their size allows them to be easily ground to add to smoothies and no bake desserts. An interesting new raw food product that takes advantage of the chia seed's quick prep time is Chia Goodness, a very hearty breakfast cereal by Ruth's Hemp Foods.

Boasting such high qualifications, we do expect the chia seed to be “the new flax seed” for 2008 and beyond. Strawberry Clafoutis
Recipe and photos by Hannah Kaminsky, Author of the cookbook *My Sweet Vegan*

1/3 Cup Soy Creamer
2/3 Cup Soymilk
3 Tablespoons Chia Seeds

3 Tablespoons Cornstarch
2 Tablespoons All-Purpose Flour
1/3 Cup Granulated Sugar
1 Tablespoon Margarine
1/2 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract
Pinch Salt
8 Ounces Fresh Strawberries

Confectioner's Sugar (Optional)

Begin by grinding down your chia seeds in a spice grinder to a fine powder. Combine both the soymilk and soy creamer in a small bowl, and whisk the powdered seeds in just to make sure no clumps form. Let it sit for 10 minutes before stirring again, breaking up any lumps, and then leave it alone for another 20 minutes afterward. Depending on how long your oven takes to heat up, you may want to go ahead and preheat your oven to 350 degrees now while the mixture is thickening.

In a separate bowl, mix together the cornstarch, flour, and sugar. Melt your margarine and stir it in, along with the vanilla and salt. Your chia mixture should now be the consistency of pudding, and it can now be added into the flour mixture. Stir until smooth, and pour the batter into a lightly greased 7 inch custard dish. Slice the strawberries in half and arrange on top as desired- No need to be as meticulous as I was! Bake for 40 - 45 minutes, until it pulls away from the sides and browns slightly around the edges. The berries may leak some juice, but don't worry, just lightly pat it with a paper towel once cool to remove the excess, or leave it if it doesn't bother you. Lightly dust with confectioner's sugar if desired.

Makes 2 - 4 Servings. Banana Chia Muffins
Recipe and photo by Alisa Fleming, Founder of Go Dairy Free and One Frugal Foodie

1 Tablespoon Chia Seeds
3 Tablespoons Water

1 Cup All-Purpose Flour
1/2 Cup Wheat or Whole Wheat Pastry Flour
1/2 Cup Evaporated Cane Juice (may substitute brown sugar)
1/4 Teaspoon Salt
1 Teaspoon Baking Soda
1 Teaspoon Baking Powder
1/2 Teaspoon Cinnamon
1/2 Teaspoon Vanilla
1/3 Cup Coconut Oil
3 Bananas, Mashed
Finely Chopped Crystallized Ginger (optional)

Add the chia seeds to the water, and allow to sit while you prepare the rest. Combine the dry ingredients in a large bowl and set aside. Combine the remaining ingredients (except for the ginger), and mix thoroughly. Add the wet mixture and the chia seeds to the flour mixture, and stir to combine. If desired, stir in the crystallized ginger, or perhaps chocolate chips if you would like. Bake at 350° for about 15 minutes or so, or until tested done with a toothpick.

Where to Purchase Chia Seeds:

- Good Cause Wellness (our source)
- Amazon Grocery
- Opal Nutrition
- The Chia Seed
- Natural Zing