Ginger

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
Gingerroot is a rhizome, an underground stem from a lush plant native to tropical regions of Asia. Its name comes from the Sanskrit word for “horn root,” referring to its knobby appearance. Since ancient times, ginger has been used for culinary and medicinal purposes. In China, for example, ginger has been used to aid digestion and to treat stomach upset, diarrhea and nausea for more than 2,000 years. Although it can no longer be found in its wild state, it is cultivated in China, India and northern Australia. India is responsible for about half of the world’s entire ginger supply, yet Jamaica is renowned for producing the world’s best quality root ginger that has a delicate aroma and fine-textured powder. Ginger is sold fresh and also dried and ground. Each variety has its unique use in the kitchen.

With a peppery and slightly sweet flavor and a spicy, pungent aroma, ginger has been a mainstay in Asian and Indian cooking for centuries. It is an extremely versatile ingredient and is commonly paired with chiles, coconut, garlic, lime and scallions to accompany fish and seafood, meat, poultry and vegetables. Asian and Indian cuisine use mostly fresh forms of gingerroot, while Europeans and Americans often use the dried ground form of ginger, commonly used in baked goods. European dishes developed using dried ginger rather than fresh because that was the form in which it came via the ancient trade routes. It was also one of the earliest spices known to Western Europe. In English pubs and taverns in the nineteenth century, barkeepers put out small containers of ground ginger for people to sprinkle in their beer—the origin of ginger ale.

Healthy ingredient contribution

**MAGNESIUM:** Magnesium is another major mineral, and it helps keep bones healthy.

**COPPER:** As a trace mineral, copper helps maintain healthy blood. Trace minerals are those we need to consume in amounts less than 100 mg per day.

**MANGANESE:** Manganese is another trace mineral, and it helps convert food into energy.

**VITAMIN B6:** Vitamin B6 also helps convert food into energy, and it helps optimize blood health.

Varieties and uses

**Fresh ginger** is available in two forms—young and mature.

- **Young ginger,** also called spring ginger, has a pale, thin skin that requires no peeling. It is tender and has a milder flavor than its mature form. It can be found in most Asian markets in the springtime.

- **Mature ginger** has a tough skin that must be carefully peeled away to preserve the delicate, most desirable flesh just under the surface. It can be found in most supermarkets year-round.

**Dry ground ginger** is very different from its fresh form and is not an appropriate substitute for dishes specifying fresh ginger. It is, however, delicious in many savory dishes such as soups, curries and meats, as well as sweets such as fruit compotes, gingerbread, gingersnaps and spice cookies.

- **Ginger juice** is the juice extracted from the root. Ginger is the flavor that has long given ginger ale and ginger beer their claim to fame.

- **Crystallized ginger,** or candied ginger, has been cooked in sugar syrup and coated with coarse sugar.

- **Preserved ginger** has been preserved in a sugar/salt mixture and is generally used as a confection or added to desserts. Melon and preserved ginger are a classic combination.

- **Pickled ginger,** available in Asian markets, has been preserved in sweet vinegar. It is most often used as a garnish for Asian dishes such as sushi.
Storage

- Fresh unpeeled gingerroot should be tightly wrapped and refrigerated for up to three weeks and frozen for up to six months.
- Dried ground ginger should be kept in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dark and dry place. Alternatively, you can store it in the refrigerator where it will enjoy an extended shelf life of about one year.
- Crystallized ginger and preserved ginger will keep for up to two years in a cool, dry place.
- Pickled ginger keeps for six months.

RECIPE

GINGER CHAI BARS

Yield: 16 servings (serving size is one bar)

Ingredients:

- Cooking spray, as needed
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 t. cinnamon
- 1 t. chai tea leaves
- 1 t. ground ginger
- 2 t. baking soda
- ½ t. salt
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 1 egg
- ½ cup molasses
- ½ cup unsweetened applesauce
- ½ cup nonfat buttermilk
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1 T. fresh grated ginger

Method:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly coat 9-inch square baking pan with cooking spray. In a mixing bowl, combine all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, cinnamon, chai tea leaves, ginger, baking soda and salt; set aside. In a heavy-duty standard mixer with whisk attachment, beat sugar, oil and egg at medium speed until well blended. Add molasses and applesauce; mix well. Add flour mixture and buttermilk alternately to egg mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Stir in vanilla and ginger. Spread batter in prepared pan. Bake on center rack at 350°F for 25-30 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out almost clean. Cool completely in pan on a wire rack; cut into squares.

Nutrition Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Calories: 180</th>
<th>Fiber: 1g</th>
<th>Calcium: 4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fat: 4g</td>
<td>Protein: 3g</td>
<td>Iron: 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sat. Fat: 0g</td>
<td>Vitamin A: 0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carbs: 33g</td>
<td>Vitamin C: 6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>