

HARVEST HEALTH – Foods from the Sea

As summer draws to a close for another year and the leaves turn, farmers across the country prepare to bring in their crops ready for the winter ahead.

But this gathering of nature's riches is not limited to the land: the seas and oceans also produce their share, yielding an underwater harvest.

DID YOU KNOW... ?

Sea vegetables are classified by their colour: red, brown or green. Nori and dulse are among the red ones, and arame, hijiki, wakame and kombu the brown (algae).

Seaweed is not just something you walk through when it's washed up on the beach. In fact sea vegetables are an extremely nutritious, low-calorie, if under-valued source of food.

More than two-thirds of the earth is covered in water, giving it a vast sub-aquatic vegetable garden that is just waiting to be tapped. In some parts of the world, notably Japan and China, the produce from this ocean garden constitutes an important part of the national diet, and has done for many centuries.

Closer to home, laver (nori) has been traditionally gathered in Ireland and Wales to make laver bread – cooked to a purée, coated in oatmeal, fried and served at breakfast. And on the Essex coast, samphire is harvested each summer – an edible salt marsh plant known as 'poor man's asparagus'.

Yet these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Seaweed mariculture is not the industry here it is in the Orient, indeed consumption of sea vegetables in the West by comparison is almost non-existent. A pity when you consider the multitude of minerals they contain – being an especially good source of iodine.

Vegetarians and vegans alike would do well to incorporate them into their diet, as they are also rich in protein, calcium and iron (some types containing more calcium than cow's milk and more protein than meat and eggs).

Use seaweed as a vegetarian gelling agent (agar agar, also known as kanten) in jams, desserts or vegetable terrines, incorporate it into salads, stir fry, soups, stews and more. Some of the more well-known varieties are:

NORI

This is one of the most important seaweeds in Japan, used commonly in everyday cooking, and perhaps the best-known in the West. It is dried and can be flaked in soups and sauces, crumbled as a seasoning or used to wrap rice balls and sushi. Usually sold in rectangular sheets. High levels of beta carotene and a very rich protein source.

DULSE (DILLISK)

Once widely used as food in parts of Scotland, Ireland, France, Norway and Canada. It is eaten dried and uncooked or in soups, casseroles, salads or bread. Roasted and ground, it can be sprinkled over meals.

ARAME

Soak for about 10 minutes in water then steam, fry, add to soups and sauces or use in salads. **Hijiki**, which has a stronger flavour, is prepared in the same way but needs about 15 minutes soaking before use.

KOMBU

Add to stews, salads and soups. Does not require soaking before use in most recipes. Can be added to beans to soften them and reduce cooking time, making them easier to digest. Roast and grind to season dishes.

WAKAME

Soak for about 15 minutes, slice and steam with other vegetables, stir-fry with noodles or deep fry. Include in salads and sandwiches.

Can be used as a condiment when toasted and ground. ■

A MILLION AND ONE USES

As well as the cooking pot, seaweed is used in the manufacture of fertilisers and animal feeds; by the textile industry; as industrial gum; in the production of medical dressings, paint, insecticides; as an ingredient in cosmetics; as a food additive in ice cream, custard, instant desserts, baby foods, and many more products.

Producing countries include Scotland, Ireland, USA, Canada, Japan, Norway, China, France, Spain and Chile.

SEA VEGETABLES' THERAPEUTIC QUALITIES

- Iodine-rich – essential for the correct functioning of the thyroid gland and the body's metabolism
- Contain a wide variety of minerals the body needs including iron, magnesium, potassium, calcium, sodium, copper and zinc
- Source of B vitamins including B12, vitamin C and beta carotene
- Can be used as a substitute for salt on food, low-fat and often high in protein
- The alginic acid in brown algae sea vegetables rids the body of toxins such as heavy metals (lead, mercury, cadmium), by binding with them. They are then expelled at the end of the digestive process.
- Reputedly beneficial for treating: travel sickness (dulse), reproductive disorders (arame), water retention (hijiki), arthritis, high blood pressure (kombu), reducing cholesterol and high blood pressure, digestive problems (nori). Hijiki is also believed to add shine to hair.

RED WHORTLEBERRY (BILBERRY) BREAD

A traditional Swedish country bread. Makes one family loaf.

INGREDIENTS

- 233g/8oz rye flour
- 233g/8oz wheat flour
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- 1½ tsp bicarbonate of soda/baking soda
- 1½ tbsp Seagreens® Culinary Ingredient
- 100g/3½oz linseed or caraway seeds
- 100g/3½oz raisins
- 100g/3½oz sunflower seeds
- 75g/3oz coarse rye flakes
- 75g/3oz coarse ground rye
- 100-150g/3¼-5oz red whortleberry conserve
- 50ml/2fl oz treacle
- 350ml/12fl oz soured milk
- 2 free range eggs

PREPARATION

- 1 Mix the dry ingredients together in one bowl and the wet ingredients in another.
- 2 Mix the dry into the wet ingredients.
- 3 Form the mixture into the desired bread shape and smooth the surface with a floury hand.
- 4 Bake in a preheated oven at 175°C (340°F), gas

- 4, for one hour, or until the centre of the bread is dry (if a skewer or knife comes out cleanly).
 - 5 Let the bread cool on a close-wired or plain baking tray.
- Useful tip:** To sour milk quickly, put one tablespoon of lemon juice into half a pint of milk and allow to stand for one hour.



STIR-FRIED ARAME WITH BROCCOLI AND MUSHROOMS



INGREDIENTS

(SERVES THREE TO FOUR)

- 1 cup Clearspring Arame, soaked for 10-15 minutes and drained
- 1 tbsp unrefined vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, cut into half moons
- 150g/5oz fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1½ tbsp Clearspring Shoyu soya sauce
- 150g/5oz broccoli, cut into small florets, boiled for three minutes and drained
- Pinch of garlic powder (optional)

PREPARATION

- 1 Heat a frying pan, add the oil, then the onions and sauté for two to three minutes.
- 2 Add the mushrooms and soya sauce and sauté for 10 minutes.
- 3 Add the arame, boiled broccoli and garlic powder, mix well and cook for one to two minutes more.
- 4 Serve with noodles.



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