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The Acorn – A Little Nut with Many Uses

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Over 2,000 years ago, acorns were first recorded as being food by the Greeks. The Cherokee, Pima, and Apache used the nuts in their diets as much as corn. They are a good source of carbohydrates, protein, six vitamins, eight minerals, and 18 amino acids. Having less fat than most nuts, one handful of acorns is equivalent in nutrition to one pound of hamburger (Atkins). Acorns also have a low sugar content, so they can help control blood sugar.

Gather acorns from September to October as soon as they have fallen off the tree. They can be dried at room temperature on a rack. If they are greener, this process may take two to four weeks. You can also dry them in the sun to speed up the process, or in an oven. Acorns remain edible for about six months of storage (Atkins).

For baking purposes, acorns can be ground into meal and used instead of flour, using only one quarter the amount of acorn meal as you would use of flour. Although a few acorns have a sweet nutty aftertaste, tannins in their content can make others taste bitter. This bitterness can be removed by soaking in water several times until the water stops turning brown.

Acorn tea can also serve as a replacement for coffee. For this purpose, some of the tannins can be leached from the acorns by pouring boiling water over them, then roasting in the oven until they are dark and dry in the shell. After they are roasted, [peel

and] crack a handful of acorns, then boil them in about three cups of water for 20-40 minutes until the water is dark, muddy brown (Atkins).

Acorns have antiviral and antiseptic properties and have traditionally been used to wash the skin in the event of rashes, burns, or scratches, and also as a gargle for sore throat. Some people use acorns externally to treat poison ivy. One method is to freeze an acorn decoction in ice trays so that you can rub the cubes on the poison ivy blisters. The ice helps soothe the inflamed tissue, while the acorns help reduce itching and burning. It has been reported that 95 percent of the people that try this method cured their poison ivy in three days (Atkins).

Because acorn is such an astringent herb, it can be used internally and externally for a number of ailments (Christopher). Native Americans used the nuts as a staple in the diet of people with degenerative, wasting diseases such as tuberculosis.

In addition to health benefits, the astringent nature of acorns has yet another purpose. The brown tannin water left after steeping or boiling can be used as laundry detergent by putting two cups in a load of clothes. However, this water shouldn't be used with white or lighter clothes because they will become tinted. In fact, this brown water was sometimes used to tan animal hides, which is where the word 'tanning' originated. ♣



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