

Health Benefits of Chayote



Chayote is a fruit that is often treated like a vegetable, much like we use tomatoes. Native to Central America, it was a food staple of the Aztecs. Commonly used in Mexico, it is often called a Mexican pear squash due to its shape, and in the South, they refer to chayote as *vegetable pear* or *alligator pear*. Its mild flavor is often described as a cross between a cucumber and zucchini with the texture of a potato.

All parts of the chayote gourd are edible, including the pit or seed, skin, flowers, leaves and roots. Although origination in South America, the chayote is used around the world in a variety of ethnic dishes across Europe, Asia and Africa.

WHAT MAKES CHAYOTE GREAT?

Nutrition

1 cup raw chayote provides 25 calories, 1 gm protein, 2 gm fiber, no fat and no cholesterol.

Vitamins

Chayote is an excellent source for many antioxidants including vitamin C, quercetin, myricetin, morin, and kaempferol and beta-carotene. It also provides B vitamins, especially folate which protects against neural tube defects and lowers homocysteine and risk of heart disease.

Minerals

Chayote is rich in manganese, which, along with vitamin K, is important for healthy bone formation, blood clotting and blood sugar regulation. Chayote contains potassium and is low in sodium to help maintain healthy blood pressure.

Other minerals include zinc, which benefits immune function and wound healing, and copper important for iron metabolism, brain development and immunity. Calcium is important for muscle contraction and bone health.

Fiber

Chayote is a good source of dietary fiber, especially soluble fiber, which lowers blood sugars and cholesterol. Fiber also aids in weight management and supports a healthy microbiome.

BUYING & USING CHAYOTE

Since it is a warm-weather crop, chayote can be found in most farmers' markets in the summer months. Grocery stores and specialty grocers will import year-round.

Seek out firm, light or dark green chayote. The skin can be smooth or bumpy. Wash and dry thoroughly before storing. Store in airtight container in the refrigerator until ready for use.

Many of the rich nutrients are located within the skin of the gourd. To prepare, chayote can be washed, sliced in half and cubed for use in raw or cooked recipes. If skins are unwanted, remove using vegetable peeler and rinse in cool water. Freeze peelings with other vegetable leftover parts for making broth. Pit can be retained or removed as desired.

Use raw chayote like you might use cucumbers, in salad, slaw or salsa or slice for extra crunch on sandwiches.

Roasting or grilling chayote brings out natural sweetness. Sauté with onions for a delicious side dish or stir fry with mushrooms and noodles. Stuffed chayote can be filled with grains or beans. Chayote can also be pickled or sprinkled with cinnamon and brown sugar for a healthy dessert.

Chayote pairs well with chiles, cilantro, corn, lime, onions, sweet peppers and tomatoes. Use in casseroles or mixed dishes for added nutrition.



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Chayote Salad

Adapted from food.com

Ingredients:

- 3 chayotes, thinly sliced
- 1 serrano chili pepper, seeded, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 small lemon, juiced
- 2 Tbsp oil
- 2 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Combine chayote, pepper and cilantro in large bowl. Mix oil, vinegar and lemon juice and pour over salad. Toss to coat.
2. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Serve with fresh tomato or berries.

Pan Roasted Chayote

Adapted from yumly.com

Ingredients:

- 2 chayote, cubed
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 Tbsp oil
- ½ tsp chili powder
- ¼ tsp turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp salt

Directions:

1. In a cast iron or heavy pan, heat oil and add onion and garlic until softened.
 2. Toss in chopped chayote and add spices. Stir and cook until chayote is cooked, about 8-10 minutes.
- Tip: Add lemon or lime juice, fresh avocado and tomatoes if using as filling for tacos.

Stuffed Chayote

Adapted from blog.fatfreevegan.com

Ingredients:

- 4 chayotes
- 1 pkg (14 oz) firm tofu
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- ½ red pepper, minced
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 cup panko or other bread crumbs
- 1-2 Tbsp Old Bay or creole seasoning
- 2 tsp corn starch

Directions:

1. In large pot, cook chayotes until tender, 10-20 minutes. Remove from water and set aside. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Cut cooled chayotes lengthwise and remove seed. Spoon out flesh keeping the shell ¼" thick. Put chayote flesh into bowl and mix in tofu.
3. In skillet, sauté onion until soft. Add celery, carrot, and pepper and cook 3 minutes.
4. Add sauteed vegetables to chayote and tofu mix. Stir in breadcrumbs, parsley and seasonings.
5. Sprinkle chayote shells with salt and pepper and stuff with mixture. Sprinkle tops with bread crumbs and place in large baking dish. Bake 30-40 minutes until lightly browned.
6. Serve with spicy cocktail sauce or tartar sauce.

Chayote Soup

Forksoverknives.com

Ingredients:

- 1 chayote, cubed
- 2 cups Yukon potatoes, cubed
- 2 cups unsweetened soy or almond milk
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 cups water or broth
- 2 Tbsp lime juice
- 2 tsp arrowroot powder
- ½ tsp cumin
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 Tbsp fresh cilantro or parsley, chopped

Directions:

1. Heat a large pot or Dutch oven over high. Add onion, garlic, and oregano. Cook and stir about 10 minutes or until onion is translucent.
2. Add chayote, potatoes, spices and 2 cups water or broth. Bring to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, 15 to 20 minutes or until squash is tender, stirring occasionally.
3. Using an immersion blender, blend soup until smooth and creamy. Stir in milk and lime juice. Top soup with cilantro or parsley and serve with quinoa or buckwheat groats.

REFERENCES

USDA National Nutrient Database
[Ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/forksoverknives.com/how-tos/what-is-chayote-how-to-cook-it/](https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/forksoverknives.com/how-tos/what-is-chayote-how-to-cook-it/)