



Super Foods of India

Indian superfoods are making a strong comeback. Rediscovering lost grains and reaffirming your faith in traditional food is slowly but surely changing the culinary face of the country.

Words BINDU GOPAL RAO

The concept of superfoods is not new—remember all the things your grandmother told you were good to eat. Simply speaking, superfoods are those that provide complete nutrition and have numerous benefits from a single source. Incidentally most superfoods are commonplace in Ayurvedic cuisine as well. “Fresh turmeric has been used in India for thousands of years as a spice and medicinal herb. Turmeric is simple to cook with, but to unleash its full potency it has to be eaten warm in a dish that contains healthy fats. If you’re using the whole root, peel the skin off and finely mince as you would with ginger root,” advises Kapil Dubey, executive chef, The Den Bengaluru. Broken wheat or *dalia* is another indigenous food with high fibre content and a low glycemic index that

ensures the glucose is released slowly, thus keeping you active longer and decreasing your craving for junk food. Chef Manoj, sous chef, WelcomHotel Bengaluru, adds, “People today are more aware about the long term benefits of these ingredients, which are healthy and everlasting than the unnatural ones (made in laboratory) that are used as substitutes and are readily available and easy to use, but have adverse effects on us.”

India is a storehouse of nutritious ingredients that have long been part of our regional cuisines. “Some of these ingredients may now be termed as ‘superfoods’, but the fact is, we just need to get back to our roots and rediscover the same ingredients to follow a healthy diet,” says Varun Movva, executive chef, Novotel Hyderabad Airport.

(Facing page) India is a storehouse of nutritious ingredients, such as banana flower; (this page) speciality supermarkets today are stocked with superfoods such as quinoa, as used in this slow roasted pork shoulder dish



Indian superfoods are very versatile and can be made into a variety of dishes, such as this *bajra* and ricotta gnudi, and jackfruit and goat cheese tacos at Toast & Tonic, or a *moringa* flower poriyal at Anya Hotels, Gurgaon



TIPS TO INCLUDE SUPERFOODS IN YOUR DIET

- Roasted flax seeds and fox nuts can be added to salads for an additional crunch.
- Simply cut and eat *amla* (Indian Gooseberry) with salt.
- Add basil seeds to your glass of juice.
- Replace sunflower oil with coconut oil for frying.
- Add *moringa* leaves to wheat flour and create *moringa theplas*.
- Create a low-calorie dessert using lotus seeds instead of rice or vermicelli.
- Eat a healthy *moong dal chilla*.

SUPERFOOD CHECKLIST

- Millets (*ragi*, *bajra*, *jowar*)
- Amaranth
- Turmeric
- *Amla* or Indian Gooseberry
- *Sabja* or basil seeds
- Coconut oil
- *Moringa* or Drumstick
- Lotus seeds
- *Moong dal*



Advantage Superfoods

While a lot of speciality supermarkets are stocked with superfoods, one look at their prices is sure to put you on the backfoot. However, the Indian alternatives are not just much better and grown locally, but also cost a fraction of their fancy counterparts. Sunjay Ghai, CEO of Revofit and co-founder of Scootsy, says, “In India, we have been using these superfoods as a regular part of our cuisine with great results. Everyone has eaten drumsticks (*moringa*) in *sambar*, or *ghee* rice or food prepared in cooked oil or *ragi rotis*, etc. We are just now becoming aware that our *daadis* were way ahead of the curve. 2018 is going to be the year of the *moringa*, as it is packed with nutrients like vitamins A, C, E, calcium and protein, and is anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal and anti-aging.” In fact, these foods are a panacea for weight watchers too.

Chef Ankit Malik of Anya Hotels, Gurgaon explains, “Since ages, *phool makhana* has been used in religious ceremonies in India and is a popular ‘fasting’ dish. Its health benefits are superior to those of dry fruits such as almonds and walnuts and it is a good source of protein, carbohydrates, fibre, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, iron and zinc. High in fibre and low in calories, it enables weight loss as well.”

coach at CureFit. Executive chef Hussain Shahzad at O Pedro adds, “Our endeavour is to work with these ingredients whilst showing great restraint and letting them shine. We use *kokum* in our kitchen extensively for various applications, at times in the form of a puree to make salad dressings, or as a cold pressed juice to finish a stir fry in place of lime/vinegar, or as a souring agent in our curries.” Anshuman Bali, executive chef, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar adds, “You could cook just as you would cook the usual recipe, except substituting the regular ingredient with a superfood alternative. Few good examples are millet *upma*, barley *hakwa* with flax seeds, and sweet banana *lassi* with chia seeds.”

Health Matters

The concept of healthy food is often associated with food that is plain and boring, but that view is also changing. “The best way to utilise these superfoods is to include them in your daily salad intake as a salad base or a fun salad dressing to perk up the taste factor of boring or bland salads. Alternately, we can also use these superfoods by incorporating them while preparing curries,” says chef Ashley Nunes, executive sous chef, Conrad Pune. Chef Gresham Fernandes, culinary

BROKEN WHEAT AND FLAX SEED PORRIDGE WITH TOASTED WALNUT

COURTESY: WELCOMHOTEL BENGALURU

INGREDIENTS

- Flax seed 10 gram
- Broken wheat 50 gram
- Skim milk 100 ml
- Jaggery 20 gram
- Toasted walnut 10 gram

METHOD

- Take a heavy bottom pan, add the milk and the overnight-soaked broken wheat. Bring to a boil. Now add the toasted walnut and flax seed to it.
- Continuously stirring, cook this on a simmer.
- Add the grated jaggery and mix. Check the sweetness, remove and garnish with the toasted walnut and flax seed. Serve hot.



Being The Change

With Indians increasingly wanting to live a healthier life with stricter diets, use of nutritive ingredients has become imperative. “Diets are becoming increasingly similar across countries. With more Indians being well-travelled, consumers are aware of the various healthy options available in the market. Hence, it becomes vital for a restaurant to provide its patrons with healthy alternatives,” says Gurpreet Singh, corporate chef and brand head, Tappa. There is a renewed interest in some of the traditionally revered superfoods. As newer research is being done on the health benefits of some of these foods, they are being embraced more readily. “The holistic health movement is also helping us make connections between more traditional, holistic and preventative approaches like Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine, which have focused on food as medicine and on superfoods that can add a health boost and reduce disease risk,” says Manasa Rajan, health and wellness

director, Impresario Hospitality and Entertainment Pvt Ltd, adds, “These are best had raw over salads or cooked with the right techniques and combination. Never over boil them or drain any cooking liquids.”

The best thing about these superfoods is that they are very versatile. “They can be cooked or just used raw in a variety of different ways. For example, *moringa* leaves can be sauteed or made into a pesto. Millets can be used as a substitute for rice. Jackfruit can be used as an excellent meat replacement,” explains chef Chirag Makwana, sous chef, Toast & Tonic. Chef and partner Thomas Zacharias at The Bombay Canteen adds, “Regardless of culinary application, it is important to choose techniques which are not only appropriate to the ingredient being used, but also retain its integrity and nutritional value. For example, pure unadulterated coconut oil has a myriad of health properties, most of which are lost if the oil is heated over a certain temperature.” It’s time to look to your backyard—your health is in your hands and it’s accessible too. ♦