

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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There are at least a few people in the area who have managed to not only raise sunflowers this summer, but also to harvest some for themselves, before the birds and squirrels helped themselves to the feast! Several callers wanted to know how to roast them. One wanted to know what the nutritional value is. Since nobody wanted recipes for using them, I guess they were just planning on sitting down and eating them plain, which is not a bad way to spend an afternoon!

While our commercial sunflowers are grown by the thousands of acres in the Midwest, they were originally grown by the Indians in what is now upstate New York. They were prized by the Indians not only for the seeds, but also for the fibrous stems that could be woven into mats and rugs, and for the gorgeous yellow dye that they made from the petals.

Sunflower seeds were probably part of pemmican, the original 'energy bars' Indians made to eat while traveling. They pounded fat and dried meat into a paste with seeds, added dried cranberries to preserve it, and shaped the mixture into balls. It lasted all winter, was easy to carry, and provided lots of energy for long hikes.

All that energy is one of the few drawbacks to eating lots of sunflower seeds. Since each seed is half fat, every ounce or 2 Tablespoons puts about 170 calories into our diet. On the good side, most of the fat in sunflower seeds is polyunsaturated fat which is healthier than saturated fat.

But still, if you chow down on a whole cup of hulled seeds, you will be packing

away about 800 calories, which most of us can't afford. If you measure your cup of seeds with the hulls still on, you only get about 160 calories, and wee bit more work cracking the seeds open and spitting out the hulls.

They are *very* low sodium. While an ounce of dry roasted peanuts has 230 mg of sodium, an ounce of sunflower seeds has *only 1 tiny little mg*. For those people who need to limit their sodium, sunflower seeds are a healthy option! If you buy salted sunflower seeds however, a lot of sodium has been added in. Read the label!

Compared to peanuts, sunflower seeds have not quite double the amount of potassium, and three times as much phosphorus. They also have a measurable amount of calcium, magnesium and zinc, and at least trace amounts of four other minerals. All of these help to control blood pressure, and are important for a healthy balanced diet. As for vitamins, they have A and E, some niacin and riboflavin, a decent amount of folic acid and a trace of vitamin K.

If you do have some to roast, spread them on a pan in a 300° F oven for 30 to 40 minutes, until they're starting to brown and smell fragrant. You can add 1 tsp of butter and salt to taste when they come out of the oven if you want.

Sunflower seeds can be substituted in almost any recipe that calls for nuts. If you use salted seeds, decrease the salt in the rest of the recipe. If you want to add some crunch, add sunflower seeds to other recipes, such as crisp rice cereal bars, cookies or muffins. They can be added to batter or breading for chicken or fish, or to pancake batter. And of course can be used as decorations sprinkled over a frosted cake or cupcakes.

This week's recipe uses sunflower kernels to add some crunch to an easy pasta dish. Serve with a big green salad, and fresh fruit for dessert. Enjoy!

Pasta with Sunflower Kernels

8 oz spaghetti pasta (plain, tomato or spinach) 3 sprigs parsley, chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 tsp grated lemon peel

1/3 C vegetable oil

salt and pepper to taste

2/3 C grated Parmesan cheese

½ C toasted sunflower kernels

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain. In small skillet heat oil, parsley, garlic and lemon peel one minute. Add salt and pepper to taste. Pour over pasta, add cheese and sunflower kernels. Toss lightly, serve hot. Serves 4.

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