

FEATURED INGREDIENT: GINGER

Susan Denzer, Chef and Culinary Consultant
Love + Craft Kitchen, LLC
www.loveandcraftkitchen.com

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KITCHEN

"And I had but one penny in the world. Thou should'st have it to buy ginger-bread."
-- William Shakespeare

Close your eyes and imagine a kitchen bustling with holiday baking and most likely the warmth and perfume of ginger will enter to scene to tantalize your senses! Fragrant, slightly sharp and spicy, ginger entices our taste buds in everything from appetizers and beverages to entrees and desserts.



photo: gate74 from Pixabay

A true example of a "superfood" and "food as medicine" ingredient long before we used those terms, ginger has an extensive and renowned history for both medicinal and culinary uses, particularly in Eastern medicine and healing practices. High demand brought this once expensive, luxury product from its native Southeast Asia to other parts of the world via explorers and traders. The top commercial ginger producers today are Jamaica, Fiji, India, Indonesia and Australia.

Look for fresh ginger at farmers markets or in the produce section of grocery stores, along with minced ginger in a jar or ginger paste in a tube. Ground ginger powder is housed in the spice section and candied or crystallized ginger is usually available in bulk bins or the baking aisle. Some markets carry ginger juice and pickled ginger in the refrigerated section, ginger lozenges in the medicine aisle and ginger extract in the baking section.

Health Benefits

Remember that "superfood and food as medicine" status? Well, it remains so. Extensive research shows ginger contains many nutrients and consuming it can aid digestion, help relieve nausea, motion sickness, and loss of appetite, lessen the symptoms of colds and flu, as well as reduce pain and inflammation.

FUN TIDBITS

It is said that...

- In the 1800's, the English began adding ginger to beer, which later led to the creation of ginger ale (carbonated water infused with ginger).
- The Greeks wrapped bread around pieces of ginger to enjoy as a digestif. This was a precursor to gingerbread which was developed later in Europe and also sold initially as a digestif.

SELECT

For fresh ginger, choose pieces (called "hands") that are:

- firm
- smooth skinned
- fragrant (a bit pungent and spicy)

Avoid pieces with:

- soft spots
- mold
- thick, fibrous skin

It is acceptable to break off small portions from larger pieces if you do not need the entire hand. If it snaps easily and crisply, it is fresh.

When choosing ground ginger powder, buy from a trusted source for freshness. A few brands I use regularly include:

- [Penzey's](#)
- [Spice Islands](#)
- [Simply Organic](#)
- [Frontier Co-Op](#)
- [The Spice Hunter](#)

STORE

Fresh ginger is best stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

- If it will be used within three weeks, leave it unpeeled and store it in the **refrigerator**. If peeled, wrap it in a paper or small cloth towel, seal it in a zip-lock bag (air removed) or place it in another container before refrigerating.
- If it will not be used within three weeks, place it unpeeled in a zip-lock bag or another container in the **freezer** for up to six months, ready to be grated skin and all when needed.
- Ginger can also be grated and frozen. Check out [Did You Know You Can Store Grated Ginger in the Freezer to Make It Last Longer?](#) by The Kitchn.

Other forms of ginger:

Dried Ginger (powder)	Lasts 2 - 3 years	Store in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dark place such as a pantry or spice cabinet.
Minced Ginger (in a jar)	Lasts 2 - 3 months	Refrigerate once opened
Ginger Paste	Lasts 1 - 2 months	Refrigerate
Crystallized Ginger	Lasts 2 - 3 years	Store in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dark place such as a pantry or spice cabinet.
Pickled Ginger	Lasts 2 - 3 months	Refrigerate once opened

USE

So very versatile, ginger is sort of like a “Girl Friday” of ingredients! Commonly thought of for gingerbread, ginger snap cookies, ginger tea, sushi, stir-fries and curries, it is a wonderful addition to salad dressings, marinades, soups and stews, and vegetable, grain and fruit dishes.

If you have not already tried it, how about adding a small amount to:

- lemonade or a sparkling beverage
- golden milk (turmeric + almond or coconut milk)
- grain dishes
- sweet potatoes

Ingredients that pair well with ginger include - cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, pumpkin, tomato, citrus, vanilla, almond, cream and coconut milk. If added near the beginning of cooking, the flavor tends to be milder. For bolder flavor, add a larger amount or add it near the end of cooking.

Dried ginger powder (or ground ginger) can be used in many recipes in place of fresh. It has a more intense flavor so less is needed. Use ¼ teaspoon dried ginger powder for every 1 tablespoon of fresh minced ginger.

For more help with preparing and using ginger, check out these links:

- [How to Peel and Mince Fresh Ginger](#) by The Kitchn
- [How to Peel Ginger](#) by Food52
- [Roasted Ginger Is the Flavor Hit We Never Saw Coming](#) by Bon Appetit

RECIPE

Pickled ginger is a tasty condiment commonly served with sushi, but it is also a fun addition to salads, sandwiches and wraps, vegetable and grain bowls, salad dressings, marinades and beverages. To make your own at home, try this step-by-step process from The Kitchn - [How to Pickle Ginger](#).

For a more classic use of ginger, try this lightly sweet, warmly spiced **Gingerbread Biscotti** recipe. It's fun and easy to prepare despite the two-step baking process, and wonderful to enjoy with tea, cider, coffee or hot chocolate any time of year.

