

Dragon Fruit: Future Fruit Crop of India

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Introduction

Dragon fruit grows on the *Hylocereus* cactus, also known as the Honolulu queen, whose flowers only open at night. The plant is native to southern Mexico and Central America. Today, it is grown all over the world. It goes by many names, including pitaya, pitahaya, and strawberry pear. The two most common types have bright red skin with green scales that resemble a dragon — hence the name. The most widely available variety has white pulp with black seeds, though a less common type with red pulp and black seeds exists as well. Another variety — referred to as yellow dragon fruit — has yellow skin and white pulp with black seeds. Dragon fruit may look exotic, but its flavors are similar to other fruits. Its taste has been described as a slightly sweet cross between a kiwi and a pear

Nutrition Facts

Dragon fruit contains small amounts of several nutrients. It's also a decent source of iron, magnesium, and fiber. Here are the nutrition facts for a serving of 3.5 ounces, or 100 grams :

- **Calories:** 60
- **Protein:** 1.2 grams
- **Fat:** 0 grams
- **Carbs:** 13 grams
- **Fiber:** 3 grams
- **Vitamin C:** 3% of the RDI
- **Iron:** 4% of the RDI
- **Magnesium:** 10% of the RDI

Given the high amount of fiber and magnesium, as well as the extremely low-calorie content, dragon fruit can be considered a highly nutrient-dense fruit.

Provides Several Antioxidants

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Dragon fruit contains several types of antioxidants. These are compounds that protect your cells from unstable molecules called free radicals, which are linked to chronic diseases and aging. These are some of the main antioxidants contained in dragon fruit pulp:

- **Betalains:** Found in the pulp of red dragon fruit, these deep red pigments have been shown to protect “bad” LDL cholesterol from becoming oxidized or damaged.
- **Hydroxycinnamates:** This group of compounds has demonstrated anticancer activity in test-tube and animal studies.
- **Flavonoids:** This large, diverse group of antioxidants is linked to better brain health and a reduced risk of heart disease.

Potential Health Benefits

Animal studies suggest that dragon fruit may provide various health benefits. Many of these are likely due to its fiber and antioxidant content. Both red and white varieties of dragon fruit have been shown to reduce insulin resistance and fatty liver in obese mice. In one study, mice on a high-fat diet who received an extract of the fruit gained less weight and had reductions in liver fat, insulin resistance, and inflammation, which were attributed in part to beneficial changes in gut bacteria.