Nuts for ‘tiger nuts’

Paleo diet-friendly ‘superfood’ might be growing in your yard.

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News Leader

Homeowners and farmers sprout it, grow it, whack it, and call it colorful names, but maybe if they knew this water-loving weed held a vitamin E and fiber-packed “superfood,” they might decide to eat it, instead.

Tiger nuts, also known as earth almonds, are the small tubers of the yellow nut sedge plant and resemble those little golf balls. The little nuts can be eaten as is, or soaked in water to make them easier to peel, chew, and use in recipes.

The yellow nut sedge’s dried tuber has a sweet and nutty taste, sort of a cross between hazelnut and coconut, while the purple variety is bitter. Records suggest the ancient Egyptians used purple nut sedge for water purification, perfume, and medicinal purposes.

According to the USDA, both nut sedge varieties have triangular stems that are easy to feel by rolling them between your finger and thumb. This is important, because the nut sedge has a toxic look-alike: tuberous verson (verurus), which has a round stem.

A good source of fiber, iron, potassium, magnesium, and vitamins C and E, tiger nuts can be highly beneficial to the gut flora and offer a rich source of resistant starch, which means they resist digestion and keep you feeling full longer.

They are also said to be a good choice for anyone suffering with digestive issues because resistant starch is a prebiotic, helping the body to naturally develop probiotic bacteria that ensures a healthy immune system.

Health food stores sell the dried raw product, shelled, or as ground flour.

Current research on human development indicates nut sedge was one of the primary food sources for early humans. According to research published by Oxford University, they made up 80 percent of the diet of “Neanderthal Man” who lived 2 million years ago.

Because they are often found

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near water, our ancient ancestors in Africa dug them up to supplement their diets when animals were scarce as a food source. Actually, the roots are more nutrient-dense than red meat, making them popular with vegetarians.

Researchers examining the dental build-up of 14 ancient people buried at Al Khiday, an archaeological site near the Nile River in Sudan recently found evidence of nutseed consumption of the purple variety.

The dried tubers have also been found in predynastic Egyptian tombs, making it one of the oldest managed weeds in existence.

In Spain, nutseed root balls are known as chufa, and they are fermented into a drink called Horchata. Fishermen there use them as bait for carp.

No matter how delighted the gluten-free folks or Paleo-diet people are with tiger nuts, farmers and homeowners do consider nutseed a nuisance.

“It really gives as a problem because it multiplies. It’s a common landscape problem for homeowners because it’s an aquatic weed so they overwater it and that just makes it worse,” said Nassau County Extension Director and Horticulture Agent IV, Rebecca Jordi.

“It’s an indicator weed in that once it’s established, it’s kind of like dollar weed, you own it. It’s not going anywhere.”

Nutsedge spreads by rhizome located deep in the earth, explains Jordi.

“They are perennials which means they reproduce by any means possible. They evolved to say, ‘I only have a short time here so I’m going to be as aggressive as I can be.’”

While Jordi dislikes the prolific tuber, she admits its value as a food source, and says it is just one of many edible weeds here in Florida.

Florida betony, also known as wild artichoke or rattle-snake weed because the tuber resembles the rattle of a rattlesnake and Smilax, a climbing shrub with tuberous roots used in soups and stews are also edible weeds.

Dandelion leaves can be added to salad, and people have been making wine out of the bright yellow flowers for centuries.

Although not widely available locally, tiger nuts can be purchased online. Better yet, dig some up and try them yourself.

For more information on edible Florida plants, visit a Pinterest board called Wild Native Edible Florida Plants & Weeds or visit fnasuf.ledu and search edible weeds.

Source: Tigernuts Traders, www.tigernuts.com

TIGERNUTS TRADERS

Tiger Nut Brownies

1 1/3 cups butter 1/2 cup white flour
14 ounces dark chocolate 1/2 cup tiger nut flour
4 eggs 1/8 teaspoon salt
2 cups brown sugar 1 cup dried tiger nuts
1 teaspoon vanilla

Lightly grease a 10-by-10-inch pan. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Rinse the dried tiger nuts under cold water. Put them in boiling water and let them boil for 15 minutes, then rinse under cold water.

In a medium saucepan, melt butter and chocolate on low heat. Combine white flour, tiger nut flour and salt in a bowl. In a separate bowl, beat eggs, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy.

Combine butter and chocolate mixture with egg mixture until thoroughly blended. Gently stir in tiger nuts.

Spread batter in prepared pan. Bake for 45 minutes in lower third of preheated oven. Let cool then cut into squares.

Source: Tigernuts Traders, www.tigernuts.com

Candied Tiger Nuts

2 tablespoons water 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/5 cup sugar 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/3 cup chopped dried tiger nuts

Boil sugar and water boil until mixture thickens. Add remaining ingredients; stir. When the sugar sticks to the tiger nuts, pour them on a baking sheet.

Spread them out so they don’t stick together.

Cool before serving

Source: Tigernuts Traders, www.tigernuts.com