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Edible Bugs



Written by Jeri Cipriano

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Bugs: Yuck or Yum?

Years ago, Japanese restaurants in the United States introduced people to sushi (SOO-shee). These dishes, made of rice and raw seafood, made many people think *yuck*. Today, sushi is sold all over the country—even in supermarkets.

Another kind of food is now starting to show up in the United States—**insects**. While the thought of eating bugs makes some people **uncomfortable**, others are starting to give insects a try. Maybe someday we'll see fried grasshoppers on our shelves!



A woman in Africa eats termites for nutrients.

Good-For-You Foods

People all around the world have been eating insects for thousands of years—and with good reason.

Many insects are good for people's health. In some parts of the world, people don't have many different kinds of foods. It may be difficult for them to get the **nutrients** they need.

Nutrition Information				
Animal	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)
Giant Water Bug	19.8	8.3	43.5	13.6
Red Ant	13.9	3.5	47.8	5.7
Silkworm	9.6	5.6	41.7	1.8
Cricket	12.9	5.5	75.8	9.5
Grasshopper	20.6	6.1	35.2	5.0
Ground Beef	27.4	26.5	32.0	2.1
Cod (Fish)	22.8	1.0	14.0	0.4

Insects have large amounts of protein. For example, 100 grams of grasshopper has around 20 grams of protein and only 6 grams of fat. That's only 6 grams of protein less than the same amount of beef.

Termites and some caterpillars are also great sources of iron, and crickets are high in calcium. Other insects, such as termite and ant queens, have large amounts of healthy **calories**. People in some places may need these calories and nutrients to survive.



Would You Rather?

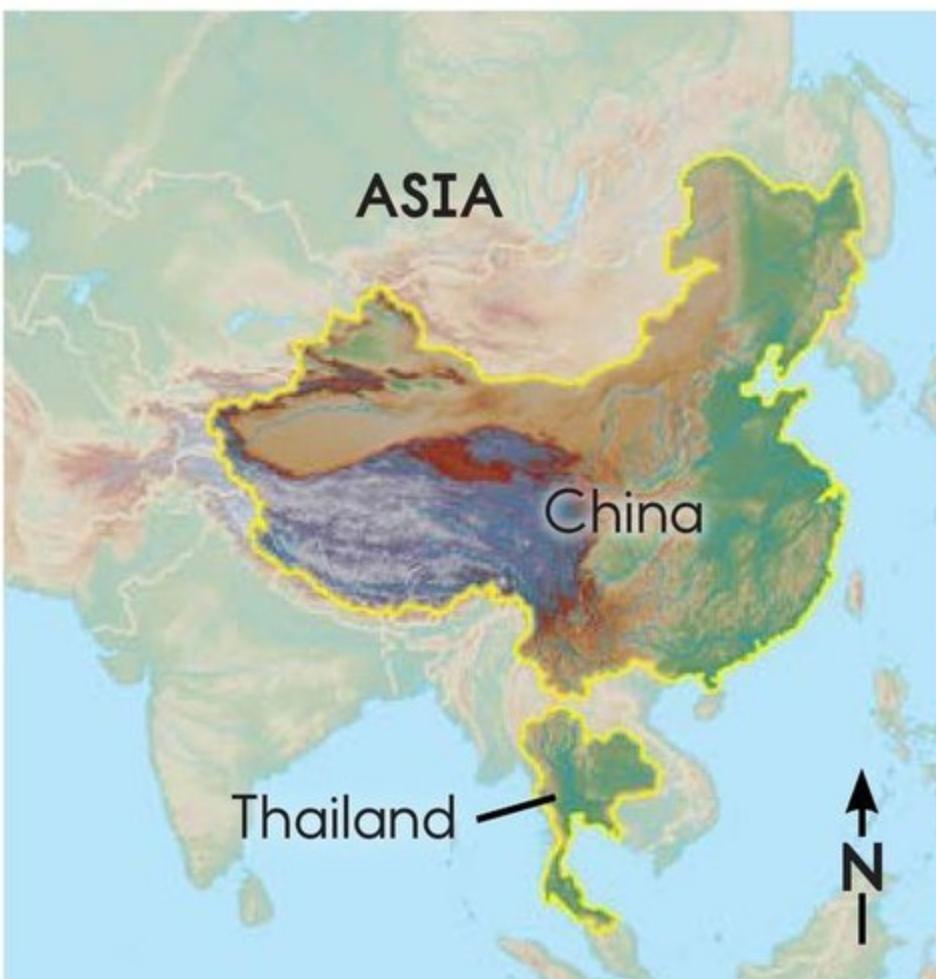
Would you rather eat an insect or a lobster for dinner? How about after you find out that insects and lobsters are related? Insects, lobsters, crabs, spiders, scorpions, and many other animals are all arthropods. These animals all have their skeletons on the outside of their bodies.

Eating insects is also good for the planet. A large insect farm creates about ten times less harmful waste than a cattle ranch. It also takes up a much smaller amount of space.

Although people eat insects in many places, it is still not very common. However, it is more common in these places than in the United States.



Two men examine the worms being grown at an insect farm.



In Thailand, a man sells many different cooked insects at a stand.

Bugs Served Around the World

Thailand

In Thailand, some outdoor stands sell crispy, fried water bugs. People add sauce just as we might put mustard or ketchup on a hot dog. Other people snack on grasshoppers and bamboo worms.

China

Water bugs boiled in a special sauce can be found in some restaurants in China. The bugs and sauce are served over rice. When the weather gets chilly, some people have a steaming bowl of ant soup.

Ghana

Some people fry or roast termites in Ghana. Termites can also be ground into flour for baking.



Snail Snacks

Other strange creatures are eaten around the world. In French restaurants, you might find an interesting item on the menu—snails. The dish is called *escargot* (es-car-GO), the French word for “snail.” The snails are taken out of their shells, cooked, and placed back inside the shells. Diners use special tools to hold a shell and pull out the snail meat.



A man collects ants in a bucket to cook or freeze for later. The ants' minty taste comes from the food they eat.

Brazil

One town in Brazil cooks queen ants every October and November. This is when queen ants come out from hiding underground. People collect the ants and remove their wings. Some fry the ants, while others dip them in chocolate. The people say queen ants have a minty taste.



At some restaurants in Mexico, you can order a grasshopper taco (top) or a plate of fried worms with guacamole (bottom).

Mexico

In Mexico, some people enjoy French-fried caterpillars or ant eggs covered in butter. For dessert, chocolate-covered locusts or candy-covered worms are sweet treats.





These witchetty grubs are ready for cooking (left). Fried silk moth cocoons are a popular treat (right).

Australia

Some Australians munch on witchetty grubs, which look like large white caterpillars. These insects have crisp skin and a smooth filling that tastes like almonds.



Japan

Some restaurants in Japan serve fried silk moth cocoons. Fried grasshoppers and other insects are sold in some stores.





The bodies or spines on some caterpillars, such as the Io moth caterpillar (left), are very poisonous and can harm people when touched or eaten. Other insects, such as the blister beetle (right), have different and painful ways to protect themselves.

Be Careful!

It's very important to remember the following: *Never eat wild insects!* Walking into your backyard for a buggy snack can be dangerous. Insects that live outside can be covered with stuff that might harm you if you eat it. Also, some kinds of insects are **poisonous** and can make you very sick.



The crickets in this insect farm are kept in clean containers until they are packaged and shipped out (inset).

People who cook and eat insects should be careful to buy them from farms. Farmed insects have special **diets**. Also, farmers make sure the insects are not exposed to things that might harm people.

In the United States, the best way to find **edible** insects is on the Internet. People can find live insects, meals made with insects, and tasty insect **recipes**.



David George Gordon is about to cook another dish using scorpions.

Let's Start Cooking!

David George Gordon, a **chef** from Seattle, Washington, wrote the *Eat-A-Bug Cookbook*. People like his pasta with six-legged meatballs, which are made with crickets. Other favorites are fried tarantula and white chocolate and waxworm cookies.

Gordon believes that eating insects is a better way to get protein than eating chicken, cows, or pigs. Insects are cheap and easy to farm in plain fish tanks. They do not harm the environment. For these reasons, insects may be the food of the future. Can you “swallow” the idea?

Glossary

calories (<i>n.</i>)	units that measure the amount of energy in food (p. 6)
chef (<i>n.</i>)	a professional cook (p. 15)
diets (<i>n.</i>)	the types of food that humans and other animals regularly eat (p. 14)
edible (<i>adj.</i>)	able to be eaten (p. 14)
insects (<i>n.</i>)	small animals with six legs, three body parts, and usually two sets of wings (p. 4)
nutrients (<i>n.</i>)	substances that living things need to live, stay healthy, and grow (p. 5)
poisonous (<i>adj.</i>)	containing a poison that is harmful when swallowed, breathed, or touched (p. 13)
recipes (<i>n.</i>)	sets of instructions, or steps, for making a specific kind of food (p. 14)
uncomfortable (<i>adj.</i>)	feeling uneasy or embarrassed; causing physical discomfort (p. 4)

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