

## **Interesting Facts About Pomegranates**

The pomegranate is a fruit-bearing deciduous shrub or small tree. Pomegranates are unique fruits with no close relatives. They are native to a region from modern-day Iran to northern India and have been cultivated throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and Mediterranean region for several millennia. Waterlogged pomegranate remains have been identified in a 14th century BC shipwreck off the coast of Turkey and Mesopotamian cuneiform records mention pomegranates from the third millennium BC onwards.

Ancient Egypt regarded the pomegranate as a symbol of prosperity and ambition. According to one of the oldest medical writings from around 1500 BC, Egyptians used the pomegranate for treatment of tapeworm and other infections. Egyptians also crushed the blossoms to make a red dye and the peel was used for dyeing leather. Pomegranates were so revered in Egypt that there were wall paintings of them in tombs and even King Tut's tomb had a pomegranate vase.

In Greek mythology, the pomegranate was known as the 'fruit of the dead' - it is featured in the myth of Hades and Persephone. It also symbolized fertility in Ancient Greece and Rome strongly associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, as well as Hera, the Greek goddess of marriage and childbirth. In Ancient Rome, newlywed women wore crowns woven from pomegranate leaves, and the juice of pomegranates was used to cure infertility.

The pomegranate appeared on the ancient coins of Judea and is mentioned or alluded to in the Bible many times. According to the Bible, King Solomon possessed an orchard of pomegranates.

It is said that King Henry VIII of England planted the first pomegranate tree in Britain. In Europe, The pomegranate prominently featured on the heraldic crests of several medical institutions including the British Medical Association.

In Turkey, after the marriage ceremony, the bride throws a pomegranate on the ground. The number of arils that fall out are believed to indicate how many children she will have. In China, a picture of a ripe, open pomegranate is a popular wedding present, expressing the wish, *"May you have as many children as there are seeds!"*

Pomegranates are a many seeded fruit about the size of a large orange, with a tough reddish-purple or reddish orange skin (There are also yellow, green and white varieties). The hundreds of small red edible seeds are surrounded by a reddish, juicy, jelly-like tangy pulp. This amazing fruit has anti-oxidant, anti-viral, and anti-tumor properties and is a good source of vitamin A, C, and E, as well as folic acid.

After the pomegranate is opened by scoring it with a knife and breaking it open, the seeds are separated from the peel and internal white pulp membranes. Separating the seeds is easier in a bowl of water because the seeds sink and the inedible pulp floats. Freezing the entire fruit also makes it easier to separate. Another effective way of quickly harvesting the seeds is to cut the pomegranate in half, score each half of the exterior rind four to six times, hold the pomegranate half over a bowl, and smack the rind with a large spoon. The seeds should eject from the pomegranate directly into the bowl, leaving only a dozen or more deeply embedded seeds to remove.

Pomegranate concentrate is referred to as molasses due to its thick consistency and dark color. It's very popular in Iran and Lebanon. This molasses can stand in for balsamic vinegar or grape must.

Grenadine syrup long ago consisted of thickened, sweetened pomegranate juice. Now grenadine syrup is often based on various berries, citric acid, and food coloring and is mainly used in cocktail mixing.

Dried pomegranate seeds, found in some natural specialty food markets, still contain some residual water, maintaining a natural sweet and tart flavor. Dried seeds can be used in several culinary applications, such as trail mix, granola bars, or as a topping for salad, yogurt, or ice cream.

The whole pomegranate fruit will keep in the refrigerator for several months, but only four or five days once it's been seeded. You can also freeze it. Put the seeds in the freezer on a tray. Once they're frozen, store them in an airtight container—they'll be good all year long. Pomegranates can be stored up to 2 months in the refrigerator.



It's not a fruit, it's a task!

## Spinach Pomegranate Salad

### **Ingredients (4 servings)**

1 (10 ounce) bag baby spinach leaves, rinsed and drained

¼ red onion, sliced very thin

½ cup walnut pieces

½ cup crumbled feta

¼ cup alfalfa sprouts (Optional)

1 pomegranate, peeled and seeds separated

4 tablespoons balsamic vinaigrette

Place spinach in a salad bowl. Top with red onion, walnuts, feta, and sprouts. Sprinkle pomegranate seeds over the top, and drizzle with vinaigrette.