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Safety

We get a lot of questions about the safety of eating these unusual vegetables. Such questions are reasonable to ask, since we mostly learn about the safety of the foods that we eat from our culture. With every new food, we lack the lifetime of experience that has informed us about how a plant is prepared and consumed.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to answer these questions. How safe is rhubarb, for example? It is commonly eaten throughout the temperate world, but it has a fairly high concentration of oxalic acid. If you eat too much of it, you could get sick. If you are predisposed to health conditions like kidney stones or gout, it could exacerbate those conditions. I've eaten a lot of rhubarb and it hasn't made me sick yet. I guess I would consider it pretty safe, but I recognize that there are situations where it may not be. How safe are peanuts? I have no trouble with them and you probably don't either, but peanuts are so dangerous to a small group of people that we label packages of food that were simply processed using the same equipment with which peanuts were processed. How about potatoes? They are perfectly safe in most cases, but if you expose them to light and they turn green, they can develop high concentrations of toxic alkaloids. The degree to which this occurs is dependent on variety and people are also not all equally vulnerable. Are these foods safe? For most people, most of the time, yes. For some people, no.

The greatest danger with unusual vegetables is that we have less experience with them. There could be certain combinations of growing or storage conditions that render them less edible. Some people may have allergies or digestive intolerances to them that we don't know about because they are not consumed by a large enough number of people. There could be consequences to large doses or long term exposure that have never been observed.

With the exception of a few plants where it is explicitly noted, every vegetable in our catalog has a history of food use by humans. In every case, I have eaten a lot of these plants before I list them. No customers have ever reported any serious problems. That still doesn't mean that they are safe. I recommend gradually introducing all new foods to your diet. Start with a small portion and wait a few days before eating it again. Increase portions slowly and eat infrequently until you feel comfortable that the plant causes you no trouble. If you have health problems, particularly allergies or digestive problems, it might be wise to consult a doctor before trying new foods.

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