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BAKED GOODS FOR THE SOUL

**Baobab 101:
What You Need to Know
About the Emerging Superfood**

Baobab 101: What you need to know about the emerging superfood

Over the past decade, baobab has been quietly — but steadily — joining the superfood conversation. The enormous, majestic baobab trees of Africa are part of a vibrant ecosystem, and their nutrient-rich fruit has long been a staple of local diets. Now the rest of the world is finally catching on. Not only does it taste great but reportedly helps boost immunity with its anti-inflammatory properties.

What is Baobab?

Baobab trees grow throughout sub-Saharan African and Madagascar. Typically massive in stature with webs of long branches, they cast a striking presence, growing upwards of 20 meters tall (more than 65 feet) and living for hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of years, often becoming a focal point of local communities socially, spiritually, and commercially.



The fruit of the baobab tree has notable nutritious properties, and can be consumed in a variety of forms, which has helped raise its global profile over the last few years. “Until recently baobabs were only tapped for local use but in a major business shift a small network of producers and suppliers has pushed the fruit’s profile abroad,” Reuters noted in a 2018 story on fruit’s soaring status. “Demand has taken off.”

Among those suppliers who have advocated for the baobab is Gus Le Breton, co-founder of the Harare, Zimbabwe, based B’Ayoba, one of the leading producers of baobab powder (the most common form in commercial use). “We are still at the very beginning of a very long journey in terms of bringing it into consumer awareness and popular knowledge,” says Le Breton, the self-proclaimed “African Plant Hunter,” an expert on the continent’s indigenous flora. “That’s no big surprise. This is a fruit that comes all the way from Africa, it has a bit of a weird name, it takes a long time to share that.”

The Power of Baobab

The baobab’s credentials have been validated scientifically in early studies of its properties. According to a 2017 report in the journal *Food Science & Nutrition*, “Baobab fruit contains nutritionally significant levels of essential nutrients including fiber, protein, and minerals. The pulp, which can be considered as naturally dry and purely organic food, is a rich dietary source of fiber, potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, and zinc. The levels of these nutrients in the pulp are much higher than those found in commonly consumed fruits such as guava, mango, berry, and bananas.”

Baobab also has been shown to exhibit strong antioxidant properties, which helps protect and repair cells from damage caused by free radicals (molecules that can trigger a variety of diseases if left unchecked). A 2018 study in the journal *Molecules* looked at baobab fruit grown in Mali and affirmed the potential benefits, concluding that “the baobab fruit pulp is a rich source of polyphenolic compounds that could play a protective role against oxidative stress.” (Like

antioxidants, polyphenols also support cell health and are believed to lower the risk of disease.)

High levels of vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, iron, and potassium qualify baobab as a superfood. While an unofficial term, superfood has become widely embraced in nutritional circles in recent years. Even the Merriam Webster dictionary added the word in 2014, defining it as “a food (such as salmon, broccoli, or blueberries) that is rich in compounds (such as antioxidants, fiber, or fatty acids) considered beneficial to a person’s health.”



And baobab’s fiber content may provide its most significant benefits. In fact, the high fiber might be the biggest nutritious value of the baobab, because it can help moderate the glycemic response and provide a beneficial prebiotic growing environment for good gut bacteria.

Baobab is also seen as an effective immunity booster — thanks in large part to its high concentration of vitamin C — and can help the body maintain its resilience.

A Sweet and Savory Flavor

Unlike many superfoods, baobab also benefits from a pleasant taste. The fruit has a flavorful combination that can best be described as tangy or citrusy. That taste has made baobab an incredibly versatile ingredient in a wide variety of products. Among the most common foods where baobab is used are cereals, sauces, jellies and jams, yogurts, baked goods (including bread, cookies, and crackers), teas, juices, energy bars, candies, and ice cream. It’s unique flavor is compatible with both sweet and savory foods.



Lately, food producers have also been promoting baobab’s benefits as a prebiotic agent. Baobab helps protect beneficial bacteria in the gut microbiome, which enhances digestive (and overall) health. So baobab can work well in foods like yogurt and probiotic beverages (which are high in beneficial bacteria).

The Business of Baobab

According to a recent report, the global market for baobab powder reached US\$6 billion in 2020, and is expected to hit US\$8.5 billion by 2027. The potential for growth is strongest in the United States, Canada, China, and Japan, and among European nations, Germany is anticipated to see the largest increase in sales.

And the greater the international market for the powder, the greater the benefits for the local communities where the trees grow, which tend to be impoverished. “Every brand that takes it on as an ingredient and makes a story about it is helping baobab producers, and by extension helping Africa,” Le Breton says. “I am only one of many producers in Africa. I’ve been taking a leading role in taking baobab forward, but lots of companies in Africa are involved in it, and there

are tens of thousands of rural people in the supply chain across Africa. So it's not just me that's benefitting, it's the whole continent."

Not only does the increased interest and demand in baobab stimulate local economies in Africa, it also provides a boost for biodiversity on the continent. Though there has been some concern about the sustainability of the trees due to climate change, most of the trees that have died in recent years were already well over 1000 years old. In general the trees are durable and adaptable and the commercial use of their fruit may actually be protecting them, because it gives local populations an incentive to look after them.



Coming to America

Previously there has been only limited availability and diversity of baobab products in the United States, but that is beginning to shift as word gets out about the fruit's superfood status and flavorful taste. Baobab can be easily found in powder form, and is emerging in baked goods, cookies, and fruit & energy bars.

Key Take-aways

- **The baobab fruit tree grows abundantly in Africa, the Middle East, and Australia.**
- **The baobab fruit powder is an emerging superfood rich in vitamin C and minerals, and is believed to have antiviral, anti-oxidant, and anti-inflammatory properties.**
- **Baobab powder and other products can be incorporated into baked goods, smoothies and food products for a subtle, citrus flavor.**

For further information, please contact us at info@nunbelievable.com or visit our website at www.nunbelievable.com



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