

Introduction

Cereal grass has been around for a long time—thousands of years. Human consumption of wheat grass and other cereal grasses has increased dramatically in the last ten years, but most people have no idea of what cereal grass really is. Many of those who have heard of wheat grass or barley grass are puzzled about their purpose in the diet. Nowadays many people view with suspicion anything labeled with the word grass as a commodity for human consumption.

We see a need for a complete source of information on this food. And so, on one level, this book attempts to provide all of the information currently available about cereal grasses.

Wheat grass is, as the name suggests, the young grass stage of the wheat plant. Given soil, air, sunshine, and water, and left to its own devices, wheat grass grows into wheat, the familiar amber waves of grain. In its youth, wheat is a very dark green, leafy plant. Barley grass is the young grass stage of the barley plant. Other cereal grasses include rye grass and oat grass. All look, smell, feel, taste, and, most importantly, have the nutrient and chemical makeup of green leafy vegetables rather than of cereal grains.

Young cereal plants were valued in ancient times. It has been said that people in the ancient Middle East ate the green leaf tips of the wheat plant as a delicacy. Bottled, dehydrated cereal grass has been a popular food supplement for people in the United States since the early 1930s.

Nutritionally, cereal grass is similar to a number of other dark green vegetables. So in a larger sense, this is a book about all dark green vegetables—why they are good for us, which specific nutrients they provide to us, and what human health and disease conditions they might affect.

Most of us go way back with green vegetables, for better or for worse. Although some of us do love those greens, we have to admit that many people consider cereal grass to be the perfect green vegetable because it is the most painless.

Everyone from our mothers to the Surgeon General has told us to eat dark green vegetables every day. But most of us don't do it. Salads made primarily from head lettuce don't really count as dark green vegetables, so we generally go without. Either we don't like them or just don't go to the trouble to prepare them.

Predicting or measuring the long range impact of a diet low in green vegetables is difficult. But evidence from population studies suggests that the typical modern diet may be associated with many of the “degenerative diseases” which are the leading causes of long term illness and death in the industrialized world.

So in the broadest sense this is a book about health, disease, and the modern diet. We provide basic, balanced information about nutrition and how it may affect our long term health. Contrary to the old saying, what you don't know *can* hurt you.

Nutrition is a very complex subject. A vast amount of money is spent each year to investigate hypotheses concerning the effect of diet on how we feel and function. There are many disagreements among people who are considered nutrition experts. Add to this the countless “facts” and claims made by those less concerned with validating their assertions, and the picture can easily move from complex to overwhelming.

Most of the information contained in this book is supported by research conducted and verified over the last sixty years in the United States, and more recently in Europe and Japan.

We have also included material which is based on our own experiences with the cereal grasses. To minimize ambiguity, we have clearly distinguished research information from anecdotal information.

We have attempted to provide a review of the scientific literature on cereal grass and other green foods, and to present this information in a manner which is understandable to non-scientists.