

THE UMAMI INFORMATION CENTER





WHAT IS UMAMI?

Simply put, umami — alongside sweet, sour, salty and bitter — is the fifth taste. As defined in the dictionary*, it is “a taste sensation that is meaty or savory and is produced by several amino acids and nucleotides (as glutamate and aspartate).” Compared to the other four tastes, umami is quite subtle and it is commonly blended with other tastes to expand and round out flavors. This can make it difficult to both describe and recognize. A satisfying taste that lingers on the palate, umami is further intensified by ripening, aging, curing, fermentation and cooking. Foods naturally rich in umami include parmesan cheese, cured ham, anchovies, mushrooms and ripe tomatoes.

*Merriam Webster dictionary

Umami In Common Foods (mg/100g)

Glutamate		Inosinate	
Kombu (kelp)	2240	Dried Bonito	474
Parmigiano Reggiano	1680	Tuna	286
Nori (dried seaweed)	1378	Chicken	283
Cured Ham	337	Pork	260
Emmental Cheese	308	Beef	90
Tomatoes	246	Nori	9
Cheddar	182	Snow Crab	5
Scallops	140	Sea Urchin	2
Green Asparagus	106		
Green Peas	106	Guanylate	
Onions	51	Shiitake Mushrooms (dried)	150
Spinach	48	Nori	13
Green Tea Extract	32	Fungi Porcini (dried)	10
Chicken	22	Oyster Mushrooms (dried)	10
Snow Crab	19	Chicken	5
Beef	10	Beef	4
Potatoes	10	Snow Crab	4
Pork	9	Pork	2

While umami was first discovered back in 1908, it wasn't until the 1980's, when scientific studies proved that certain taste receptors on the tongue respond to umami, that it was recognized as a legitimate fifth taste.

THE HISTORY OF UMAMI

Dr. Kikunae Ikeda, a Japanese scientist, was the first to discover that the umami taste of kombu (kelp seaweed) could be attributed to the amino acid glutamate. His research revealed that high levels of glutamate could be found in kombu and were responsible for its umami taste. 2008 marks the 100th year anniversary of Dr. Ikeda's discovery.

Because “umami” is a Japanese word and Dr. Ikeda was Japanese, some believe that umami is a taste found solely in Asian cuisine. This is untrue. Just as sweet, sour, salty and bitter can be identified in a wide range of European, American, African and Asian cuisines, so too can umami, and it has played an important role in the cuisines of countries all over the world for centuries.

ABOUT THE UMAMI INFORMATION CENTER

Founded in 1982, the Umami Information Center (UIC) is an international non-profit organization with offices in Asia, Europe and North America. The focus of the UIC is to educate people about umami and

build awareness worldwide. Our efforts include the publication and dissemination of educational, scientific, and culinary literature and media, and the organization of workshops, seminars, and symposia.



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