

# Stevia-Sunflowers-And Sweeteners

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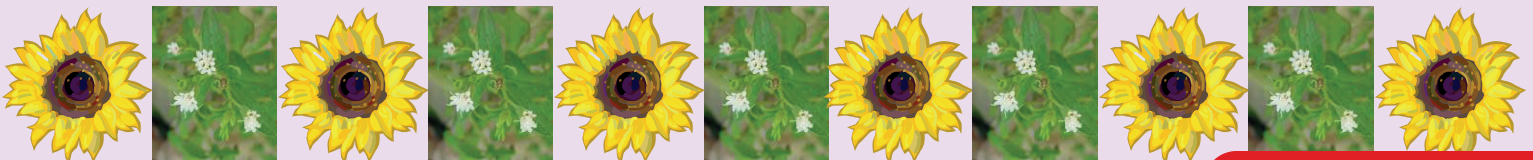


**What's the relationship of Stevia, sunflowers, and sweeteners?** Ever so sweet, stevia belongs to the sunflower family. It is native in the tropical and subtropical climates of Central and South America. Because of its intensely sweet taste, the leaves can be eaten fresh, or put directly in teas and foods. Water extraction, the most common process, results in compounds that are heat stable, ph stable and non-fermentable. With its extracts having up to 300 times the sweetness of sugar, stevia is becoming increasingly popular as a "natural sweetener". One interesting aspect of Stevia is that its taste has a slower onset and longer duration than that of sugar. The peak of Stevia's sweetness is seconds after you taste it, so you must take be careful to not overdue it when first trying it out. If you use too high a concentration, it may have a bitter licorice-like aftertaste.

**Japan began cultivating stevia in the 1970's** as an alternative to artificial sweeteners such as saccharin and cyclamate. Since then, Japanese have been using stevia in food products, soft drinks and for table use. Japan currently consumes more stevia than any other country though many other Asian countries including China, South America, Australia and Israel have increased their share in the market.

**However, health and political controversies have limited stevia's availability in many countries.** The USA banned it in the early 1990s unless labeled as a supplement. The subject of searches and seizures, trade complaints and embargoes on importation, stevia has been handled at times by the FDA as if it were an illegal drug. After much howling from its proponents, the stevia extract has finally received its GRAS status. (FDA language for generally recognized as safe). Rebiana, or Reb-A, the trade name for a zero-calorie sweetener made from stevia was permitted in December of 2008 by the [FDA](#) as a food additive. It soon could be added to foods from yogurt to baked goods to diet soda.

**The bottom line is that as with all newly approved substances,** the final word on long-term studies is not in yet. It might be interesting for you to try this product in a cup of tea or lemonade and wise to stay alert for late breaking scientific reports on stevia.



References: & [www.accessdata.fda.gov/stevia](http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/stevia) & [www.nutritionaction.org/stevia](http://www.nutritionaction.org/stevia)

Eat Smart Program \* Missoula City-County Health Department  
(406) 258-3827 \* [www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthservices/EatSmart](http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthservices/EatSmart)

