



Kala Namak or Sanchal Black salt

Kadipatta Curry Tree or Sweet Neem leaf



Sanchal Black salt
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Salt of the Earth

Salt—that grainy stuff you use to season everything from meat to veggies—is actually sodium chloride, a unique food and essential nutrient that comes from the sea, or remnants of it.

All salt intended for our consumption is harvested through evaporation, whether helped along by machines or done the old fashioned way with the sun and open air. In fact, it's the evaporation process that determines the size and texture of salts' grains.

Black salt (Hindi kala namak or sanchal) is an unrefined mineral salt that is actually pinkish gray and has a strong sulfuric flavor. Black salt is mined in India and is used extensively in Indian cuisine as a condiment or added to chaats, chutneys, raitas and many other savory Indian snacks. Chaat masala, an Indian spice blend, is dependent upon black salt for its characteristic aroma and flavor. Chemically, black salt is sodium chloride, with iron, sulfurous compounds and trace minerals.

Black salt is considered a cooling spice in ayurvedic medicine and is used as a laxative and digestive aid. It is also believed to relieve intestinal gas and heartburn. It is sometimes used by people with high blood pressure or on low-salt diets because it is thought to be lower in sodium and purportedly does not increase sodium content in the blood.

Black salt is appreciated by vegans in dishes that mimic the taste of eggs. It is used, for example, to spice tofu to mimic an egg salad.

Black Salt (known as Kala Namak or Sanchal in Hindi) is a special type of Indian volcanic rock salt. It is actually purple-ish/pinkish grey rather than black and has a very distinctive sulfurous mineral taste, rather like hard boiled egg yolks.

Uses of Black Salt

Indian Kala Namak is considered a cooling spice in ayurvedic medicine and is used as a laxative and digestive aid. It is also believed to relieve intestinal gas and heartburn. Kala Namak is appreciated by vegans in dishes that mimic the taste of eggs. It is used, for example, to spice tofu to mimic an egg salad. It is also regularly used in small quantities in chutneys, raitas, pickles and many other savory Indian snacks, adding a very different flavor than just using regular salt. Try sprinkling it on fresh cut fruit such as apples and bananas for a delicious treat. Can also be used to replace sea salt or table salt.

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The trick to seasoning your food just right with all types of flavorful salts is right at your fingertips, literally! Simply keep these tips in mind:

When making soups, stews or sauces that will reduce while cooking, use little, if any, salt at the beginning since the flavor will concentrate over time.

Salt measurements in recipes are standardized for ordinary fine salt, so if you're using salt with larger crystals or flakes, like kosher salt, make sure to adjust the measurement as needed. (A rule of thumb: if 1 teaspoon fine salt is required, use about 1½ teaspoons kosher salt.)

Add salt to the surface of baked goods and desserts to enhance their sweetness and provide a rounder, fuller flavor.

A dish salted to taste at room temperature will taste less salty after chilling.

Adding salt to cooking water has the effect of cooking boiled vegetables, such as green beans, slightly faster and minimizing nutrient loss. Handy trick, huh?

Salty Language

Ordinary table salt is adequate for ordinary cooking, but sea salt or other specialty salts can make food extraordinary. Learn the difference:

Colored salt: Natural colored salt is most often a coarse, large crystal good for pinching. Examples include sulfurous black salt from India and pink salt from the foothills of the Himalayas and the Murray River area of Australia. (Note: keep in mind that colored salt's appeal is primarily an aesthetic one.)

Flake salt: Refers to salt that comes in the form of flakes instead of crystals. One of our favorites is Maldon sea salt, harvested on England's south coast.

Fleur de sel: A hand-harvested sea salt that comes from the coast of west-central France. It may be a bit expensive, but keep some around for its wonderful flavor and moist, crunchy texture.

Iodized salt: Because iodine deficiency was once a persistent problem in some parts of the U.S., manufacturers began adding iodine to table salt in 1924. Iodine deficiency remains a serious problem in Africa and parts of Asia but has been largely eliminated in the developed world, where people routinely get the iodine they need from other food sources.

Kosher salt: A relatively pure salt that contains no iodine or other additives. Its moderately coarse texture makes it an excellent pinching salt for general use and great for making brines, too. Our second favorite use for it? Using kosher salt to coat the rims of margarita glasses.

Pickling salt: Refined salt that has sufficient enough purity to prevent cloudiness in the brines used to make pickles. A bonus? It also has no additives and dissolves rapidly.

Roasted salt: Salt that's been heated over a fire, usually in a container that transfers flavor and aroma to the finished product. (Curious? Try Korean bamboo salt, which gets roasted over a pine resin fire in bamboo cylinders plugged at both ends with yellow clay unique to the region. We love the stuff for sprinkling over roasted or grilled meats and veggies.)

Rock salt: Salt that's mined from underground deposits. Various processing techniques give it lots of different shapes and uses, from block salt for livestock to coarse salt for grinders to fine-grained popcorn salt. (Bet you didn't know that more than 90% of all salt manufactured in the U.S. is rock salt?)

Sea salt: Any salt that's been harvested from the sea. Excellent all-purpose salt that's typically less harsh than rock salt.

Smoked salt: Natural smoked salt is coarse sea salt that's been smoked over wood fires; it can range in color from light grey to dark brown. Using smoked salt lends an assertive smoky aroma and flavor to foods of all kinds, from grilled fish to creamy soups and corn-on-the-cob.

Table salt (a.k.a. fine salt): The most common salt. Often contains additives designed to slow moisture absorption so that it's easier to pour in a salt shaker.



Salt: Good vs. Evil

Like the rebellious kids your parents didn't want you to play with, salt has developed a bad reputation. But the body actually needs sodium to regulate many of its functions, including heartbeat, nerve impulses and circulatory volume. It's only when consumed in excessive amounts that it reportedly contributes to high blood pressure, kidney disease and fluid retention.

Very little salt is required—perhaps less than a third of a teaspoon a day— to get the sodium necessary for good health. The majority of people can consume salt in moderate amounts without consequence but many cultures have acquired a taste for salt that borders on addiction.

For this reason, avoid salt in highly processed snacks and convenience foods, or use these tricks to reduce your salt intake:

Substitute herbs, spices or citrus zest for salt.

Rinse high-sodium foods like pickles, olives and canned vegetables and beans in fresh water before eating.

Eat more fruits and vegetables. These foods are high in potassium, which complements sodium and contributes to a healthy balance of the two elements in the body.



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