



INTERNATIONAL

STEVIA  
COUNCIL

All about Stevia

# What is Stevia?



**Stevia is a small shrub native to the region of South America where the borders of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil meet.**

The scientific name for stevia is *Stevia rebaudiana* Bertoni and it is a member of the largest family of plants, Asteraceae which is also called the “sunflower family”.

There are 240 close relatives of stevia and they are all herbs or shrubs originating from the tropical and semi-tropical areas of North, Central and South America.

The discovery of the sweetness of the stevia plant is attributed to an Italian-Swiss botanist, Dr. Moisés S. Bertoni, in 1901. However, researchers believe the use of the plant to sweeten medicines and foods by indigenous people dates prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century.

## Extracting the Sweetness

The sweetness found in the stevia plant is released by steeping its dried leaves in water, filtering and separating the liquid from the leaves and stems, and further purifying the plant extract with either water or food grade alcohol – all conventional plant extraction methods.

The result is a naturally sourced, high intensity sweetener that does not impact blood glucose levels.

### Did you know?

The sweet extract of the stevia leaf is up to 450 times as sweet as sugar, but without the calories.

## A safe and widely used sweetener

For decades, high purity stevia extracts have been approved for use in foods and beverages in Japan. In the last five years, leading food safety and regulatory agencies across the world have issued positive safety opinions on the safe use of purified stevia extracts in foods and beverages.

These include the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the French ANSES (National Agency for the Security of Food, the Environment and the Work), the Food Standards of Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and most recently the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

## Suitable for everyone

Pre-clinical and clinical studies show that the use of stevia extracts is safe for the general population including people with diabetes, children and pregnant women and that there are no known side effects or allergies.



## Benefits

As a plant-based sugar substitute with no calories, stevia extracts represent the perfect, unprecedented opportunity for consumers who are looking for a naturally sourced calorie-free sweetening option in their search for a healthy lifestyle balance and weight management program. Stevia extracts also do not contribute to the development of dental caries.

## The great clean taste

Purified stevia extracts have a great, clean taste very similar to that of sugar. In the past, stevia has been criticized for having a bitter, licorice-esq after taste. Not anymore. Higher quality raw material and advanced extraction technologies have been developed by manufacturers that have focused on isolating the best tasting parts of the stevia leaf.



## Long history of use

<b>16th Century</b>	The stevia plant was first discovered by indigenous people who used the plant's leaves to sweeten drinks.
<b>1901</b>	Dr. Moisés S. Bertoni attributed with the "discovery" of the plant and the plant classified as <i>Stevia rebaudiana</i> Bertoni.
<b>1931</b>	Two French researchers isolated the sweet components (steviol glycosides) of the stevia leaf.
<b>1971</b>	Japan began using stevia as a sweetener in foods and beverages.
<b>1986</b>	Brazil authorized the use of stevioside (one of the steviol glycosides) in foods and beverages, followed by other countries throughout the 1990s.
<b>2008</b>	The U.S. Food and Drug Administration determined that stevia extracts are Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) for use in foods and beverages.
<b>2009</b>	The use of rebaudioside A, extracted from stevia plant, in food and beverages was approved in France.
<b>2011</b>	The EU gave final regulatory approval for the use of steviol glycosides in foods and beverages.

## Frequently asked questions

### **What is stevia and where does it come from?**

Stevia is a plant of the Asteraceae (sunflower) family, the leaves of which have been used as a sweetener in South America for hundreds of years. Extracts from the stevia leaf have been available as food additives (sweeteners) and/or dietary supplements in many countries around the world.

### **How are stevia extracts made?**

Stevia extracts are made by water extraction and further refining of the sweet components of the stevia leaf.

### **Are stevia extracts natural?**

Yes, stevia extracts are natural. However, the definition and labelling requirements regarding "natural" may vary among countries.

### **How many calories do stevia extracts contribute?**

Stevia extracts contribute effectively zero calories.

### **Are stevia extracts safe; are there any side effects; do they cause any allergies?**

Yes, the safety of stevia extracts has been extensively reviewed and scientifically proven by numerous international organizations, such as the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). There are no known side effects or allergies from the use of stevia extracts in foods and beverages.

### **Are stevia extracts safe for consumption by diabetics? Do they affect blood sugar levels? What is their Glycemic Index (GI)?**

Research has shown that stevia extracts do not affect blood glucose levels or interfere with insulin. With effectively zero calories, stevia extracts offer people with diabetes greater variety and flexibility in budgeting total calorie intake and assisting with weight management. Stevia extracts do not have an effect on GI, at the levels of use.

### **Can stevia extracts be used in any kind of food and beverage? Are there restrictions in usage? How do they interact with other sweeteners?**

Stevia extracts can be used in a wide variety of food and beverage applications. Individual usages and use levels may vary depending on the country. They act synergistically when used in combination with other sweeteners.

### **Are stevia plants genetically modified?**

No, stevia plants are not genetically modified. Development of new plant varieties takes place by selective breeding and not genetic modification.

### **Where can I find products made with stevia extracts?**

Hundreds of new products are being launched each year made with stevia extracts across a wide range of countries and products from table top sweeteners to beverages. Stevia extracts have become particularly common in Asia, South America, the United States, and recently in Europe.



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The International Stevia Council is a global trade association representing the interests of companies that process, manufacture and/or market stevia sweetener products.