A year ago, I thought that aloe was just for rubbing on freckled + pink sunburned skin; a use that I’m well-versed in thanks to my predominantly Irish and Swedish genes. Typically, my only hope for attaining a tan is allowing the freckles on my face to merge together into larger freckles that, from a distance, morph into a glorious bronze hue. Those of us freckle-graced gals are like walking, talking, breathing versions of Seurat’s finest; tan from a distance, just a bunch of freckles up close. Freckled pointillism.

Thanks to an extra sweaty hot yoga session last June and a quick stop at a snazzy grocery store in our neighborhood, I came to know aloe as an edible, drinkable hydration super tool. After purchasing a few dozen bottles of the stuff over the past year and realizing that many brands contained extra additives, I decided to step outside my comfort zone and make some myself.

It turns out that aloe is not only hydrating; it’s also very humbling. While grocery shopping last Friday, I grabbed an aloe stalk the length of my arm, attempted to contain it within a plastic bag, and placed it in my overstuffed cart. I then proceeded to forget that it existed in about two seconds flat and moved onto the bulk section. It turns out that I have the attention span of a goldfish while grocery shopping — too much sensory input from all those glowing veggies. After scooping 7-too-many ounces of hemp seeds into another bag, I moved a bit too swiftly toward the cart, and the sharp tip of the aloe stalk poked me right in the armpit. It seems that a Lulu half-zip is no match for a prickly succulent.

An aloe poke to the armpit = an hour of humility, a week’s worth of pain + a forever-holey half-zip.

Lesson learned. It’s important to pay attention when you’re introducing sharp plants into your diet.

Mishap aside, the aloe purchase has been a huge success. Dan and I spent a quick 15 minutes this past Saturday “harvesting” the gel from the inside of the stalk and have incorporated it into smoothies throughout the week. Harvesting aloe gel is actually a surprisingly simple process and, thanks to Dan’s scooping assistance, I was able to photo-document the 4 easy steps. The one important thing to mention is that the gel is super goopy. There is really no better or more scientific way to put it. This stuff is slippery, slimy, and tricky to contain in your hands. However, its gelatinous quality is exactly what makes it an amazing detoxifying agent.

The first smoothie we made was our favorite, so that’s the recipe I’ve included in this post. It’s a combination of aloe gel, frozen strawberries, water, pure maple syrup, and lemon juice. So simple and so deliciously refreshing. The aloe adds this frothy, smooth consistency without imparting an overpowering taste or consistency.

**Health Perks of Aloe Gel**

2. Balances digestion + elimination.
3. Aids in detoxification. Its gelatinous qualities absorb toxins as it makes its way through your system so that they can be properly removed.
4. Promotes alkalinity.
5. Contains 20 of the 22 amino acids, including 7 of 8 essential ones.
6. Inhibits inflammation.
7. Enhances immune function and stimulates the body’s defenses against stress.
step 2 | carefully run your knife down the sides of each piece to remove prickly edges

step 3 | filet each piece of aloe by slicing it vertically down the
step 4] Scoop the aloe gel with a spoon and transfer to a bowl or jar, being careful not to scoop the yellow or green skin with the flesh.
Strawberry-Lemonade Aloe Vera Smoothie

Recipe type: Smoothie, Juice

Serves: 1

Ingredients

- ¼ cup fresh aloe gel
- 1 ½ cups frozen strawberries
- 1 cup water
- 1 ½ tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Instructions

1. Add all ingredients to a blender. Blend on high for 1-2 minutes or until smooth and frothy.
2. Pour into a glass and enjoy!

Notes

Aloe gel can be stored in an airtight container for one week. Blend it into smoothies or chop it up and add it into juices. Be careful not to include the green or yellow skin when you're scooping out the gel as it tends to have a laxative effect.