

# GUIDE TO VEGETABLES

## *Nutrition*

### GUIDE TO VEGETABLES - COOKING 20 SEASONAL VEGETABLES

Depending on where you live, the availability of vegetables will vary by season. Eating seasonally not only allows you to enjoy a variety of local foods, it insures the foods are at their peak in flavor and also are rich in vitamins and minerals.

Eating locally also helps to support your local economy! Also, since transportation is limited, there is an environmental benefit to selecting local, seasonal foods. Seasons create their own natural diversity and eating consciously with the seasons allows us to enjoy and appreciate those flavors. If your local region does not support a multitude of vegetables, which often happens in colder climates in the winter months, supplement with frozen vegetables or vegetables from other regions that have greater availability.

Many states have seasonal availability charts through a local farmers-market or cooperative extension that can help you find seasonal foods in your area. Also, Epicurious has a great resource for seasonal availability, the interactive "Peak-Season Map".

<http://www.epicurious.com/archive/seasonalcooking/farmtotable/seasonalingredientmap>

Involve yourself in the production of your vegetables at any possible level. Here are a few ideas.

1. Grow a garden if you can or simply just pot some fresh herbs
2. Join a CSA, specifically one that allows you to know the farm and farmer
3. Shop at a farmers market you can see what is in season
4. Cook seasonal vegetables

Here are a few favorite Fresh 20 seasonal finds and cooking methods to optimize flavor:

### **SPRING**

#### **Asparagus**

Asparagus is rich in many vitamins and antioxidants. Along with kale and Brussels sprouts, asparagus is a particularly good source of glutathione which is a detoxifying compound that helps our body to break down harmful compounds such as carcinogens. Three ways to cook asparagus:

- Roast: Snap off woody ends and roast in oven at 425 degrees for about 15 minutes. Use olive oil, salt, and pepper.
- Grill: After removing woody ends, add oil, salt, and pepper and grill uncovered for 8-10 minutes, rotating to cook evenly. Grilling enhances the natural earthy flavor of asparagus.
- Blanch: Asparagus turns a vibrant green when blanched. Cook for about 2-3 minutes in boiling water and then immediately transfer to an ice bath to shock and stop cooking. Asparagus is beautiful on a spring vegetable plate.

# GUIDE TO VEGETABLES

## *Nutrition*

### **Various Lettuces**

I recommend eating leafy greens daily. You can add them to practically any dish or create salads to accompany meals. Leafy green vegetables are more affordable, more nutritious, and more practical than most vitamin pills. Grow your own, buy them at the farmer's market, or choose from the wide selection at most grocery stores. Leafy green vegetables are rich in Vitamin A, K, C and various B Vitamins. B Vitamins are known for improving energy so if you feel run down eating a plate of greens can help. They are also rich in minerals, water, and fiber. To prepare most greens:

1. Simply wash and cut for salad or toss a handful into your smoothie.
2. For heartier greens, saute with garlic and olive oil.
3. Add to pasta dishes at the end of cooking (after heat is off) to wilt slightly but maintain a bite. Arugula works well in this method.

### **Fava Beans**

Fava beans, also known as broad beans, are found in the spring in large, sturdy pods (you can almost always find the beans frozen throughout the year). Fava beans are high in both soluble and insoluble fiber, and rich in iron, folate, potassium, and manganese.

Fava beans are wonderful sautéed with garlic and vegetables for a primavera dish or added to a stir-fry dish.

Great tip: Use fava beans in place of garbanzo beans for a twist on hummus.

### **Fennel**

Fennel aids in digestion when eaten raw. For a quick flavor boost, thinly slice fennel over top of a salad. Alternatively, roast fennel with olive oil, salt, and pepper to bring out the anise flavor or add a little parmesan cheese for a savory treat.

Fennel can also be used in place of celery or onion in tuna or crab salad or in soups.

### **Peas**

Peas, like potatoes, sometimes have a bad reputation because they are higher in starch than most vegetables and poorly prepared peas have clouded the enjoyment of this vegetable for many. However, peas are a wonderfully rich source of nutrition. As a source of carbohydrates, peas are rich in fiber and protein both of which aid in weight management. Peas should be steamed boiled for 2-3 minutes in a very small amount of water. Add salt after cooking or they will get tough.

1. Peas work very well with mint in salads, soups, or sautés.
2. Add peas to smashed potatoes for a sweet twist.

# GUIDE TO VEGETABLES

## *Nutrition*

### SUMMER

#### **Eggplant**

Eggplant is a member of the nightshade family of vegetables. It has a rich meaty flavor, is low in calories, and is rich in vitamins, phytochemicals, and minerals. Eggplant is often associated with perhaps its least healthy preparation: fried eggplant parmesan. However, it can be prepared in a wide variety of healthy ways and is found in many different cuisines.

To prepare simply, grill eggplant with olive oil, salt, and pepper for 3-4 minutes per side. This is wonderful on its own, but also a great way to start many dishes. After grilling, eggplant can be layered with herbs and other vegetables or chopped and served over a salad. Eggplant also is wonderful roasted, sautéed, and stir fried.

#### **Corn**

Corn is fiber, protein, and antioxidant rich. It is always available frozen, but during the summer fresh white and yellow corn are wonderfully sweet and full of nutrition. The antioxidant benefits of corn are enhanced through cooking. Corn contains lutein which promotes healthy vision.

Submerge corn in husks in water and then grill inside husk for 20 minutes to bring out the natural flavor. Prepare extra ears of corn and store in the refrigerator for a quick salad topper or easy weekday succotash.

#### **Peppers**

Have you ever seen a purple, white, or multi-colored bell pepper? Check out your local farmers market and you will notice that green, yellow, orange, and red are just a few of the many varieties available. Of the most commonly available peppers, red is the greatest nutritional powerhouse. However, bell peppers of all shapes, sizes, and colors are excellent sources of vitamin C, vitamin A, fiber, and folic acid.

Keep cut fresh raw peppers in your refrigerator for a nutritious, low calorie snack. Add them to a stir fry or try them roasted or grilled. Grill, broil, or roast peppers and then place them in a covered container to steam for about 15 minutes. The skins will scrape off easily, leaving a sweet, soft vegetable that stands alone or can be added to salads, sandwiches and pasta.

# GUIDE TO VEGETABLES

## *Nutrition*

### **Summer Squash**

Zucchini bread, zucchini pasta, zucchini pancakes...zucchini is an extremely versatile summer vegetable! It is low in calories (more so when prepared without eggs and sugar), rich in potassium and fiber, and high in folate and vitamins A and C.

If you have never tried zucchini noodles, there are two simple ways to create this low calorie pasta substitute. If you have a spiralizer, zucchini noodles are easy to prepare. However, a standard vegetable peeler can make long thick noodles which resemble papardelle pasta. Top with a summer pesto and add fish, chicken, or beans for a light twist on a summer favorite.

### **FALL**

### **Beets and Beet Greens**

Every part of the beet is easily edible and complete with wonderful nutritional benefits. Beets and beet greens can be prepared in a variety of ways. Beet greens are a wonderful addition to soups, salads, and sautes. Shred beets and serve them raw or roast them to bring out their rich flavor. Store roasted beets in the refrigerator and pair with onions, goat cheese, and pistachios or just serve simply with olive oil and vinegar. Beets are also wonderful blended into a smoothie or juiced.

To roast beets, wash them and wrap in foil. Set on a cookie sheet and roast for 45-60 minutes at 375 degrees. Remove from oven and let sit for 10 minutes; beets will peel easily after roasting.

### **Pumpkin**

Pumpkin is a great source of fiber, antioxidants, and vitamins. Pumpkin is rich in vitamins A, E and C, as well as iron, magnesium, and potassium. It's a wonderful food to refuel after a hard workout since it's high in potassium; it's a natural electrolyte, good for both blood pressure control and for your muscles.

Pumpkin is a wonderful addition to fall chili, adding a creamy rich flavor and great nutrition benefit. Or, try adding ¼ cup to your cooked oatmeal for a healthy dose of morning nutrients. Cooking with kids? Pumpkin is a great addition to pancakes and muffins and because of its consistency, it can replace some of the fat in your recipes for a naturally lean treat.

Don't forget to save and roast the seeds!

# GUIDE TO VEGETABLES

## *Nutrition*

### **Cauliflower**

Since cauliflower is packed with phytonutrients, minerals, and vitamins (especially vitamin C and B vitamins), it's a good thing such a variety of preparations are known. Cauliflower is thick and hearty, so it is perfect for roasting and it holds up well in sauces and soups and is even used as a low-carb pizza crust substitute.

### **WINTER**

### **Brussels Sprouts**

Brussels sprouts are part of the family of cruciferous vegetables and like leafy greens, they should be a regular part of your diet. Brussels sprouts are rich in vitamins and minerals and high in antioxidants and fiber (about 4 grams per cup). If you don't enjoy them simply steamed, try roasting to bring out their earthy flavor, or shred and sauté Brussels sprouts for a warm winter salad.

### **Escarole**

Escarole may not be as easily available as other dark greens, but its worth trying if you can find it. Escarole has a mild flavor compared to other deep greens. Like other greens, it is rich in antioxidants, vitamins A and K, and also is a source of vitamin C. It is most often available in the fall and early winter months, but you can usually find it and various members of the chicory family during the winter season.

Escarole and beans work well together as a sauté or soup.

### **Winter Squash**

There are many varieties of squash widely available in the cooler fall and winter months. Squash is generally known to be harvested in the fall, but since it stores well it is available through most of the winter season. Rich in fiber, it is also a great source of many vitamins and minerals. One cup of squash meets nearly half your daily requirement for vitamin C and squash is loaded with disease fighting carotenoids. Among the most commonly available varieties are spaghetti squash, acorn squash, and butternut squash. Select a heavy squash without significant blemishes or bruises. Squash purees well so if you are making food for babies or small children, it's a great choice.

Roasted squash stands alone as part of a hearty meal, but can also be used on salads and blended into soup.