

Asparagus



Dig In

Asparagus is grown from roots underground. It's shoots break through the soil and reach their harvest height of 6-8 inches. Spring is the best time to grow this long, thin, green vegetable and, surprisingly, this crop has a very long life, almost 10 years! There are four types of asparagus, green, white, violet, and wild. Green asparagus is the most common form in America while white asparagus is popular in Europe. When purchasing asparagus, look for odorless stalks with dry, tight tips. Avoid limp or wilted stalks. Refrigerate and store for up to four days by wrapping the ends of stalks in a wet paper towel and storing in a plastic bag.

Nutritional Tidbits



Asparagus is:

- an excellent source of folate which helps in blood cell formation.
- high in Vitamin K which plays an important role in helping blood clot.
- a good source of Vitamin C which helps in healing wounds.
- a source of the antioxidant glutathione, which plays an important role in the prevention of certain cancers and diseases.

Think Outside the Peel

Enjoy asparagus...



- in your favorite pasta dish.
- within a savory soup.
- as part of a stir fry.
- roasted in the oven.
- in an omelet.

Safety Tip

If an item looks or smells differently than it should, discard it, especially if the item has mold growing on it.



Further Exploration

Impress all of your friends with this easy and delicious recipe for asparagus.
<http://www.bhg.com/recipe/vegetables/garlic-roasted-asparagus/>

Avocado



Dig In

The avocado is a pulpy green-to-purple skinned fruit that is grown on various tropical trees. While avocados mature on trees, they actually ripen once they have been harvested, much like a banana. Hass avocados are the most popular variety in the United States and the majority of avocados grown in the U.S. come from California and Florida. The best way to tell if an avocado is ripe and ready-for-use is to gently squeeze the avocado, it should be firm yet will yield to gentle pressure. While an avocado is technically a fruit biologically, USDA's MyPlate classifies it as a vegetable.



Nutritional Tidbits

- Avocados are a rich and creamy vegetable containing monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat. These unsaturated fats are known as the “heart healthy” fats. Replacing some of the saturated fats in your diet with healthy fats can help in reducing cholesterol and lowering the risk of heart disease.
- A half of a medium avocado is a good source of potassium, which is an essential electrolyte that helps muscles move and allows the kidneys to filter blood. The right balance of potassium and other electrolytes literally keeps the heart beating!

Think Outside the Peel



Use avocado...

- to make a zesty guacamole.
- as a spread on toast.
- to add creaminess to sandwiches, wraps and burgers.
- sliced in salad.



Safety Tip

When packing a lunch, use a well insulated container with an ice pack or another cold source.

Further Exploration

Learn how to select and buy ripe avocados by watching the video in the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LND1JQZ_U6I

Blueberries



Dig In

The majority of blueberries are grown on bushes in humid, northern climates that have chilly winters and mild summers, 38 states produce blueberries commercially! More than half of all cultivated blueberries are shipped fresh, the rest are frozen, pureed, concentrated, canned or dried and used in a variety of food products. When selecting blueberries at the store, choose firm, plump, dry blueberries with a dusty blue color. This fruit can be stored up to 2 weeks.

Nutrition Tidbits



Blueberries are:

- packed with Vitamin C which helps maintain healthy gums and capillaries as well as a healthy immune system.
- a good source of dietary fiber which helps in preventing constipation.
- full of phytochemicals which may help to prevent many types of chronic diseases, cancers, and heart disease.

Thinking Outside the peel

Enjoy blueberries...



- as a sweet topping on pancakes, waffles or French toast.
- in a yogurt parfait.
- as part of a fruit smoothie.
- tossed in a lettuce salad with vinaigrette dressing.

Safety Tip

Do not store ready to eat foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables with or under raw meat to avoid cross contamination.



Further Exploration

Watch the video in the following link to see how blueberries travel from farm to table:

<http://www.blueberrycouncil.org/blueberry-facts/where-blueberries-grow/>

Cantaloupe



Dig In

Cantaloupes are named for the papal gardens of Cantalupo, Italy, where some historians say this species of melon was first grown. Melons need room to grow and are planted about 36-48 inches apart. When shopping for cantaloupe, choose fragrant sweet smelling cantaloupe that are firm but not rock hard. Cantaloupe are ripe when the skin beneath the textured “web” is orange or gold in color. Store whole cantaloupes at room temperature for up to one week and cut cantaloupe in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

Nutritional Tidbits



Cantaloupe is:

- a juicy treat that provides an excellent source of Vitamin A which promotes good vision. One 1/2 cup serving provides 54% of the Daily Value needed of Vitamin A.
- also a rich source of Vitamin C which is necessary for growth and development.
- fat-free and low in calories with only 27 calories per 1/2 cup serving.

Think Outside the Peel

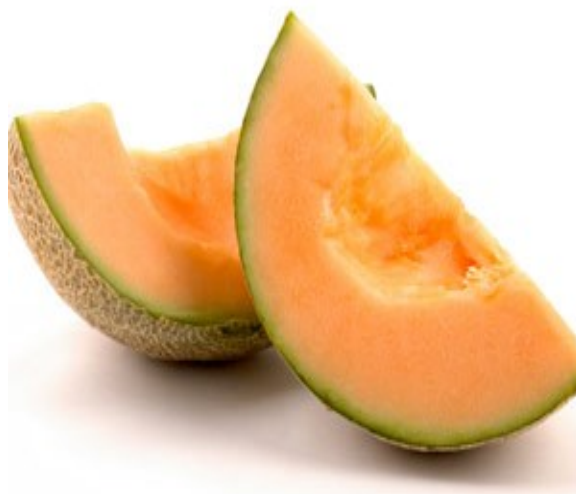


Use cantaloupe...

- as part of a fruit kebab.
- with other varieties of melons to make a melon salad.
- as a side with cottage cheese.
- to make flavored water.

Safety Tip

Melons should be washed under running tap water to remove bacteria before cutting. Sliced cantaloupe should be stored in the refrigerator until it is ready to be eaten.



Further Exploration

Make your own personal nutrition and physical activity plan to begin a healthy lifestyle! Get started by going to <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov>

Cauliflower



Dig In

This crunchy veggie requires a lot of care and attention throughout the growing process and is considered a cool-season crop. This vegetable does not tolerate the heat or cold well and will not produce heads unless the temperature is consistently in the 60s. Not all cauliflower is white; there are also purple, green and orange varieties. When buying cauliflower, choose a head with compact curds and bright green, firmly attached leaves. Avoid heads with brown spots or loose sections that are spread out. Cauliflower can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 5 days in a plastic bag.



Nutritional Tidbits

Cauliflower is:

- an excellent source of Vitamin C. Consuming Vitamin C rich foods aids in the absorption of iron, which can help to prevent iron deficiency-anemia. Teenage girls as well as women of childbearing age are at an increased risk for developing iron-deficiency anemia.
- low in calories. One 1/2 cup serving provides 13 calories and 0 grams of fat.
- a cruciferous vegetable that contains phytochemicals that have anti-cancer properties. Phytochemicals are found naturally in plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, beans and grains.

Think Outside the Peel

Use Cauliflower...



- to make low-calorie “mashed potatoes”
- as a side dish by roasting in the oven with olive oil and salt.
- as part of a veggie tray for the next social event.
- to make a pizza crust.

Safety Tip

When selecting precut fruits or vegetables, only choose items that are refrigerated or held on ice.



Further Exploration

Watch and learn how to chop cauliflower at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1phLHtmVVk>

Kiwifruit



Dig In

Don't let the brown and fuzzy outer peel of a kiwifruit fool you. When opened up, the kiwifruit (sometimes nicknamed "kiwi") reveals a vibrant green color with a sunburst shape that has a sweet tart taste!

Kiwifruit are grown on vines and need a lot of attention and care.

California produces 98% of the kiwifruit grown in the US. To determine if a kiwifruit is ripe enough to eat, press the outside of the fruit with your thumb, if it gives to slight pressure it is ripe. If it doesn't give to pressure, it's not ready to eat.

Nutrition Tidbits



Kiwifruit:

- is an excellent source of Vitamin C, a 1/2 cup of kiwifruit provides 138% of the Daily Value of Vitamin C need, compared to a 1/2 cup of orange which provides 80% of the Daily Value of Vitamin C. Vitamin C is proven to boost the immune system and fight the effects of stress and aging.
- provides about 8% of the Daily Value needed of potassium in 2 kiwifruit (1/2 cup fruit). 2 kiwifruit deliver slightly more potassium (278 mg) than 1/2 cup banana (269 mg).

Think Outside the Peel

Use kiwis...



- to make a refreshing kiwi strawberry smoothie.
- as an ingredient in a tangy fruit tart.
- in a yogurt parfait.



Safety Tip

Make sure to always wash your fruits and vegetables thoroughly before using them in order to prevent food borne illness. This includes produce with the peel on it.

Further Exploration

Download the FREE fitness app MyFitnessPal to track your daily exercise and nutritional intake! Don't have a smart phone? Check it out online at www.myfitnesspal.com

Mango



Dig In

This colorful fruit is grown on evergreen trees in tropical areas with cool, dry winters, and steamy, hot summers. Most of the mangos sold in the U.S. come from Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti. Don't judge a mango by its color—red does not mean ripe. Squeeze the mango gently to judge its ripeness, a ripe mango will give slightly and a firm mango will ripen at room temperature over a few days. Avoid mangoes with sap on the skin.



Nutrition Tidbits

Mango is:

- a good source of folate, a 1/2 cup of this fruit provides 10% of the Daily Value for folate. Folate helps the body make red blood cells and DNA.
- an excellent source of Vitamin C. Vitamin C helps keep gums and teeth healthy. A 1/2 cup of mango provides 50% of the Daily Value for Vitamin C.
- rich in Vitamin A which plays in role in bone growth.

Think Outside the Peel

Use Mangoes...



- in a chunky, fruity salsa.
- on top of fish for a flavorful kick.
- to add beautiful color to a fresh fruit salad.
- as breakfast confetti, serve diced mango bits over waffles or pancakes.

Safety Tip

When using a Chef's knife, the index finger and thumb should be opposite each other on either side of the blade while the remaining fingers are loosely curled around the handle.



Further Exploration

Take the mystery out of cutting a mango by watching the video found at <http://www.mango.org/how-cut-mango> to learn how!

Peaches



Dig In

Just by looking at their beauty, it may come as no surprise that peaches belong to the rose family. Peaches are grown on trees throughout the warmer and temperate regions of both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. There are more than 2,000 varieties of peaches. To find the best peach, first take a whiff: a ripe peach should have a sweet fragrance. Next, give the fruit a gentle squeeze. A ripe peach will yield to gentle pressure. The color of a peach tells more about the variety than its ripeness.

Nutritional Tidbits



Peaches:

- deliver 8% of the Daily Value needed of Vitamin A in 1/2 cup of this sweet fruit. Vitamin A does more than help you see in the dark, it also plays a role in remodeling bone and regulating cell growth and division.
- have only 30 calories and less than .5 grams of fat per 1/2 cup serving.
- provide about 2/3 cup of fruit in 1 whole medium peach.
- have the same amount of nutrition in frozen and canned versions as fresh peaches because the preserving process does not strip the fruit of any of its nutrients.

Think Outside the Peel

Enjoy peaches...



- grilled with a sprinkle of cinnamon.
- at breakfast over cereal, waffles, or yogurt.
- over grilled chicken or fish, by making a peach salsa.
- in a fruit cobbler.

Safety Tip

Avoid purchasing fruit with broken skin. Bacteria can enter through the skin and contaminate the fruit.



Further Exploration

Unsure of how to read a food label? Learn about the nutrition facts label and the information it provides at http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/labels.html.

Pineapple



DIG IN

Many believe that pineapples are grown on trees; however, they are actually grown on the ground. The green leafy top of the pineapple, called the crown, is used as planting material. Each crown is planted by hand.

One pineapple plant produces only one pineapple every 2 years. Once a pineapple is harvested it will get juicier with time but its sweetness will remain the same as pineapples do not ripen after being picked. Many assume the majority of pineapples come from Hawaii, yet Southeast Asia is the primary producer of pineapples.

Nutrition Tidbits



Pineapple:

- is rich in Vitamin C. The body is not able to make or store Vitamin C; therefore, it is important to consume foods that contain this essential vitamin in your daily diet.
- is an excellent source of manganese which helps maintain healthy bones and contributes to a normal energy metabolism.
- contains bromelain, an enzyme that breaks down protein, which aids in digestion and makes pineapple juice a good meat tenderizer.

Think Outside the Peel

Enjoy pineapples...



- on top of pizza, otherwise known as Hawaiian pizza.
- as part of a kabob with other fruits.
- as a topping on a grilled chicken sandwich.



Safety Tip

Wash hands thoroughly with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds, before preparing any kind of food.

Further Exploration

For instructions on how to cut a pineapple, make sure to visit <http://www.rachaelraymag.com/videos/v/50454845/how-to-cut-up-a-pineapple.htm>

Red Pepper



Dig In

Red peppers are actually a variety of green bell peppers but have matured into a slightly sweeter version. Bell peppers are vegetables grown on plants and come in a variety of colors, sizes and shapes. The variety of pepper plant and the stage of ripeness determine the flavor and color of each pepper. Take out the seeds on the inside before eating. When buying peppers, look for ones that are firm and wrinkle-free with a stem that is fresh and green. Peppers stay fresh for about a week in the refrigerator.

Nutritional Tidbits



Red Pepper:

- is an excellent source of Vitamin A which is key for good vision, a healthy immune system and cell growth.
- is rich in Vitamin C. Including Vitamin C in our daily diet is important as humans can not make or store Vitamin C. There is more Vitamin C in one red bell pepper than there is in one orange.

Think Outside the Peel

Use red peppers...



- to make a roasted red pepper hummus.
- as part of casseroles, sandwiches and salads or on top of pizza.
- to make baked stuffed peppers.
- on a kabob to add color and crunch!

Safety Tip

Refrigerate fresh fruits and vegetables within two hours of peeling or cutting. Discard any cut fruits and vegetables that have been left at room temperature for more than two hours.



Further Exploration

Cutting a bell pepper might seem tricky but it is actually very easy. Check out this link to learn how to cut a bell pepper!
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MOj3XDBP6U>

Spinach



Dig In

Spinach is a cool-weather crop which means that it can be one of the first vegetables to be planted and the first to be harvested in the springtime. Spinach is grown in the ground and has similar growing conditions as lettuce. In the 1920's, the U.S. pushed spinach commercially with Popeye the Sailor man who became an advocate for this dark-leafy green. When selecting spinach, choose a fresh, crisp, green bunch with no signs of insect damage. Loosely wrap spinach in a damp paper towel and store in the refrigerator for up to 3-5 days.

Nutritional Tidbits



Spinach:

- is high in Vitamin K which is important for blood clotting, strong bones and cell growth. A 1/2 cup serving of raw spinach provides nearly the entire Daily Value of Vitamin K needed.
- is an excellent source of Vitamin A which helps eliminate harmful substances from the body, also known as free-radicals.
- takes 1 cup of cooked spinach to be 1 cup from the vegetable group; however, a person would need to consume 2 cups of raw spinach to be considered 1 cup from the vegetable group.

Think Outside the Peel

Enjoy spinach...



- as part of a salad.
- in omelets to add a punch of nutrients and flavor.
- hidden in smoothies. By adding blueberries you can even mask the green color.
- to add nutrients to a turkey sandwich.



Safety Tip

Bagged salad and spinach mixes that are pre-washed do not need to be washed again. If the package does not indicate that it is washed - or you have any doubts - wash it again.

Further Exploration

Are you eating enough fruits and veggies during the day? Rate your plate at the following website.

<http://www.eatright.org/nnm/games/quiz/index.html>

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Sugar Snap Peas



Dig In

Many people confuse sugar snap peas for snow pea pods. The distinct difference is that snow pea pods are flat and somewhat empty on the inside and sugar snap peas have plump edible pods with a crisp, snappy texture. Look for sugar snap peas that are firm, with glossy pods. The peas inside the pod should fit firmly and not be loose and rattling inside.

Nutritional Tidbits



Sugar Snap Peas:

- are an excellent source of Vitamin C which is needed for the growth and repair of tissues in all parts of the body.
- are low in calories and sodium with 1/2 cup serving providing just 13 calories and 1 mg of sodium.
- a 1/2 cup serving is equal to about 10 pea pods.

Think Outside the Peel

Enjoy sugar snap peas....



- raw in salads or as an on-the-go snack.
- cooked as part of vegetable stir-fry.
- roasted in the oven which brings out the sweetness of the peas.
- on a vegetable platter with your favorite dip.



Safety Tip

You should scrub all fruits and vegetables with water to remove any pesticides, dirt or bacterial contamination before eating.

Further Exploration

Can you tell the difference between fact and fiction when it comes to nutrition? Visit the following link to test your nutrition knowledge.
<http://www.eatright.org/nm/games/MythOrFact/index.html>