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(805) 451-0289

What's Fresh in the Winter?

Eating fresh locally grown produce is easy in the summer months. Everyone's favorite produce is at its peak in flavor and nutritional value, and the wonderful summer heat inspires all of us to eat fresh simple foods. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, cucumber, and an assortment of fresh fruit are at their peak, but what grows in the cold?

Cruciferous vegetables love cold weather. Broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collards, cabbage, and brussel sprouts are some of the favorites from this family, and they are full of flavor and nutrients this time of year. Cruciferous vegetables have been getting a lot of press lately. One of the big reasons for this are naturally occurring indols as well as other phytonutrients that are found in this family of vegetable. Many of these are anti cancer and liver nourishing. In fact one study found that guinea pigs that were fed broccoli sprouts were able to survive lethal levels of radiation! Broccoli is extremely high in calcium, and kale is a great source for blood cleansing chlorophyll. Many people spend big bucks on indol and chlorophyll supplements, but this is totally unnecessary, especially in the winter when all of these wonderful vegetables are at their peak.

Winter squash are still around from the fall. When was the last time you had some kabocha, butternut or delicata squash? If you can't remember, than you need to go to the market and pick up some winter squash before it is too late. As far as preparing squash, just think potato. Here's an easy place to begin. Take the whole squash and put it in a oven at 350 and let it bake until soft (aprox 1 hour, but really depends on size). Then let it cool a bit and slice it up or just scoop out the tasty flesh from the inside. Please try the skin. It is delicious and is extremely nutritious. In fact, when possible always try to eat the skin of fruits and vegetables. Many of the nutrients concentrate



there.

Root vegetables are amazing right now as well. The cold forces the plants to store more of their energy in their roots, so carrots, beets, parsnips, and rutabagas, just to name a few, will all will have superior flavor right now. They may not be as glamorous as some of the summer vegetables, but when used properly they can produce some delicious winter meals. One of my favorite salads is a combination of shredded carrot, beet and celery with a simple Italian dressing. Next time you make mashed potatoes, replace half of the potatoes with rutabagas. The slight difference in flavor is a welcome change and because rutabagas are less starchy than potatoes, you won't have to add as much cream or butter to get that smooth consistency.

Educated News

Because of the great turn out at the first cooking class, the Santa Barbara Jewish Federation will be offering a 4 week cooking class series taught by Chef Micah of The Educated Vegetable. Healthy Jewish Cooking, Are You Kidding? will focus on healthful and vegetarian Jewish and Israeli classics, but as many of you know there are Jewish people all over the world,

so their may be some interesting fusion cuisine going on! Sign up early to assure yourself a spot. Classes will be held at the Santa Barbara Jewish Federation March 2, 9, 16, and 23 from 4pm to 6pm. Dinner is included. *Being Jewish is not a prerequisite for signing up and their will be no religious aspect to the classes.*

I Love Fats, and So Should You!

No kitchen is complete without a good supply of high quality oils. Fats are essential for many techniques and recipes. Further more, they are necessary for optimal health. Vitamins A, D, E and K are fat soluble nutrients and thus require fat to be assimilated. Our nerves need a steady supply of fat to function properly. Fat is necessary for the production of hormones, and helps keep our skin and hair vibrant and soft. It warms the body and helps stimulate the feeling of satiation. This in turn helps us to stop eating when we are actually full. In fact every cell in our body is encapsulated in a thin layer of fat. Quality fats and oils are health promoting foods, and should be included in ones diet everyday.

When purchasing oils make sure to always buy cold pressed unrefined products. This means that the oil has been extracted without the use of chemicals or heat. This is important. When oils are over heated they become rancid and in turn, carcinogenic. Refined oils are stripped of all flavor and nutrients, and the refining process leaves chemical residues in the final product. Some people have more than a dozen different oils in their pantry, but I want to shed some light on 3 of my favorite choices.

By far the most popular and best choice for most cooking is extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). EVOO is a monounsaturated fat, the type of fat shown to improve blood cholesterol levels. It lends a wonderful grassy flavor to salad dressings and when used for moderate heat cooking gives dishes a flavor that is impossible with any other cooking oil. I often will make clients mayonnaise from scratch using EVOO instead of the traditional highly refined soybean oil. EVOO oxidizes or smokes around 325 degrees. This means that it is not a good choice for high heat cooking. The grassy flavor mentioned earlier sometimes does not lend itself to certain dishes. Although I have been known to toss EVOO in the pan and make a Thai stir fry, this is not the best choice for an authentic flavor. However for most Mediterranean food EVOO is almost always the perfect oil.

Another favorite of mine is grape seed oil. This oil is well known in culinary circles for its ex-

remely high smoke point and neutral flavor. There are many other oils available with these attributes, but to my knowledge, it is the only unrefined oil that stays virtually flavorless and stands up to high heat. Grape seed oil doesn't smoke until just over 425 degrees. It is by far the best choice for frying. I often use grape seed oil to fry falafels or in Indian dishes where high heat is required to pop fresh mustard seeds. In situations where one wants to avoid the grassy flavor of EVOO in salad dressings, grape seed oil is a nice alternative. Grape seed oil is high in vitamin E and is a great source of the EFA omega 6. So throw away your canola, safflower and soybean oils. Grape seed oil is a much better choice whenever a recipe calls for these oils.

This last one is going to surprise some people. No kitchen is complete (unless it is vegan) without high quality organic unsalted butter. Some recipes are simply not the same without butter. It's richness and texture is a true pleasure to the palette and, in my opinion, not worth avoiding. Butter is not just concentrated calories, it is concentrated nutrients. Butter is a very good source of vitamin A, especially when it comes from free range cows that eat lots of green grass. The cows convert the carotenes in green pastures into vitamin A which then passes into their milk. In a vegetarian diet, vitamin A can be very hard to come by. When eaten in moderation butter and other dairy fats can be health promoting. In ayurvedic medicine ghee (clarified butter) is used extensively in healing regimens and everyday cooking. Ghee is thought to lubricate the body. Quite similar to an automobile, we need oil to keep all of our parts moving freely. Ghee can be purchased at most gourmet and health food stores, but nothing is quite like the homemade stuff. The rich almost sweet and subtly caramel flavor can be an amazing addition to many dishes.

Homemade Ghee

1. Take 1 lb of organic unsalted butter and melt it in a sauce pan. Then bring the butter to a simmer. Yes, it will simmer because there is a good amount of water in butter.
2. Turn the heat down to as low as possible and allow the butter to simmer very slowly and watch as the milk solids and the oil separate.
3. Eventually (after aprox 20 minutes) the simmering will stop. This means there is virtually no water left. At this point the milk solids will slowly begin to brown on the bottom of the pan. Once the solids begin to change from off white to a nice caramel color pour the butter into a large jar through a few layers of cheese cloth. The cloth will catch any of the solids that haven't settled to the bottom of the pan.
4. Put a lid on the jar and either refrigerate or not. It's up to you. Because well made ghee is exclusively fat, it will stay fresh for at least a few weeks on your counter. In the fridge it will last for at least a few months. Like butter it will solidify at room temperature. This is normal.

