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Freshness is Your Best Tool in the Kitchen

Ask any chef what the secret to good food is and just about all of them will answer, "High quality ingredients!" As with any craft, the better your raw materials, the better your finished product. There are many ways to assure that one is using the best raw materials available in the kitchen. These are a few of my secrets.

Lets start with produce. I am a big supporter of cooking with local and seasonal ingredients. Not only does buying local support our local farmers (who bust their butt everyday of the year), but it almost always means a superior product. I recently was served eggplant parmesan at a dinner. It was prepared well, but was just o.k. Eggplant is a great example this time of year. When one buys eggplant (a late summer, early fall food) from a grocery store in March, they are purchasing eggplant that was most likely grown in Mexico using chemical fertilizers and an assortment of pesticides and herbicides to keep the bugs off of the struggling plant. After being harvested, the eggplant undoubtedly sits around for a few days, only to be shipped thousands of miles in boxes over the course of a few more days or maybe even a week. They then show up at a grocery store where they sit on the shelves for another few days until the consumer shows up and buys it. The end result is a flavorless eggplant covered in chemical residues that is far away from its home. This is considerably different from the organically grown eggplant one can buy at the local market in August, that was undoubtedly picked



earlier that day washed in some water (not chemicals) and sold that afternoon. Not to worry, there are plenty of great foods that thrive in the colder months. For more on this please see the February newsletter.

Another "trick" is to use fresh herbs. Fresh herbs offer up a much better flavor that their dried versions cannot compete with, especially when they've been on your shelf longer than you can remember. To get the most flavor out of fresh herbs, add them at the end of cooking. The heat cooks off many of the aromatic oils that give them their "fresh" flavor. People often complain that they don't buy fresh herbs because they go bad before they have a chance to use them. Take the fresh herbs and wrap them in a damp paper towel and then put them in a bag in the fridge. This will help keep them moist and fresh for a few weeks. Something else to keep in mind when using fresh herbs instead of dried is that one needs to double the amount in a given recipe. This is because there is still quite a bit of water in the fresh product so the flavor, although superior, is not quite as concentrated as in a dried product. There are so many herbs to play with. Most grocers and produce stands readily stock parsley, oregano, marjoram, dill (in the summer), basil (in the Summer) thyme, rosemary, chives, tarragon and cilantro. All of these herbs are not only full of flavor, but are also packed with a variety phytonutrients.



It isn't hard to make great tasting food. If you want to learn more great tricks in the kitchen contact The Educated Vegetable for a private cooking class!

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Beyond Protein Powder

It seems that just about everyone has tried some sort of protein powder these days. Adding protein powder to juice or smoothies can be very helpful for balancing blood sugar, recovery from workouts and many other applications. Many health professionals agree that whey protein is the superior form of protein powder on the market. The ratio of amino acids in whey protein is superior to other protein powders. Also, whey is very high in the amino acid l-glutamine. L-glutamine is the predominate amino acid in muscle tissue and has also been shown to promote the production of human growth hormone. Many people also find that l-glutamine helps curb sugar cravings.

One problem with all protein powders is that they are isolated substances that are devoid of many necessary cofactors that are found in their whole food sources. Ed Bauman, of Bauman College, suggests a remedy that I have found very useful for myself as well as my clients. To “bring protein powder to life” he suggests the addition of ground whole flax seeds along with micro algae. Whoa, that sounds pretty weird. I know what you are thinking. “That must taste terrible!” Believe it or not neither of these things change the flavor of a smoothie very much, and any small change in flavor is well worth the huge boost in nutrition with the addition these whole foods.

Flax seeds have gotten much press over the past few years as the importance of omega 3 fatty acids has become accepted by main stream medicine. Omega 3 fatty acid has been shown to moisten skin, nourish glands, improve memory and mood, as well as promote fat burning. Whole flax seeds offer all of the same benefits as flax oil, including many others. Flax seeds are an amazing source of lignan, a fiber that is very gentle on the system yet very effective. Lignan binds with excess bile, cholesterol, estrogen, and cortisol and flushes them out of the system. This in turn helps reduce ones risk for many forms of cancer. Flax seeds, like all seeds, are a great source of protein along with the micronutrients zinc, magnesium, calcium, potassium, and chromium.

To get to all of the goodness in flax seeds, they need to be ground up. Otherwise they slip through the system undigested. Ground flax seeds are available, but I highly recommend buying the whole seed and grinding the seeds fresh each time you use them. Once the seeds are ground, they become rancid very quickly. Any simple coffee grinder will do the trick.



There are a few different micro algae available. These include spirulina, chlorella, and blue-green algae. Although there are small differences between each of these, they all offer similar benefits when included on a regular basis in one's diet. Micro algae are the most basic food on the planet. With this being the case, it shouldn't be surprising to discover that they are ex-

tremely nutrient dense. By weight, micro algae are the best source of chlorophyll around. Chlorophyll is almost chemically identical to human blood. (one atom different). Because of this it is very nourishing to human blood and has been shown to help sweep toxins out of the system. Micro algae are also an amazing source of viable B vitamins, including the often hard to find B6 and B12. They offer up a complete protein because they possess the full range of essential amino acids and are more than 50% amino acid by weight. Best of all, because of their very simple structure this amazing food is extremely easy to digest.



Each type of micro algae has specific applications as well. For more information on how to use specific micro algae to support different conditions and lifestyles, contact The Educated Vegetable for a nutrition consultation.

I find that a good combination for these 3 nutrition powerhouses is 1-2 tbsp protein powder with 2-4 tbsp flax powder and 1-2 tsp of micro algae. With this combination one ends up with about the same amount of protein as one of those big scoops that comes with the protein powders but in a much more balanced and nutritionally dense format.

Smoothies can easily be prepared without recipes, but some of my favorite combinations are as follows:

Blueberry Banana

1 banana
1/2 cup blueberries (fresh or frozen)
1/2 cup whole milk yogurt
2-4 tbsp ground flax seeds
1-2 tsp micro algae
1-2 tbsp protein powder
1/2-1 cup water (depending on how thick you like it)

Almond Date

1 banana
2-3 pitted dates
1 tbsp almond butter
1/2-1 cup soy milk
2-4 tbsp ground flax seeds
1-2 tsp micro algae
1-2 tbsp protein powder
1-2 cup water (depending on how thick you like it)