

Enjoying the Fall Harvest

Harvest comes from the Old English word for autumn, “Haerfest”, means to reap, gather and store what has been grown. This season is associated with abundance and joy as it is the culmination of many months of hard work. As the leaves change and the air turns crisp, embrace the nourishing power of autumn’s harvest. By enjoying seasonal produce, you not only fuel your body but also connect with nature—a vital aspect of maintaining a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle at any age.

Autumn brings a variety of nutrient-dense foods that not only taste delicious but also offer numerous health benefits. These seasonal favorites are perfect for incorporating into a balanced, heart-healthy diet.

Pumpkins and squash, for example, are fall staples packed with vitamins A and C, ideal for supporting immune health and reducing inflammation. Their rich texture makes them perfect for soups or roasting.

Sweet potatoes are another autumnal delight. These vibrant vegetables are loaded with fiber and potassium, making them an excellent side dish for anyone looking to support heart function and maintain stable blood pressure levels.

The harvest season also brings **crisp apples and pears**, full of antioxidants and dietary fiber. These fruits are not only tasty snacks but also great for heart health, helping reduce cholesterol levels and improve digestion.

For those **who love their greens**, the fall harvest delivers dark, leafy vegetables like kale and Brussels sprouts. Rich in nutrients like vitamin K and folate, these vegetables can enhance cardiovascular health while providing a hearty base for many dishes.

Eating seasonally provides many health benefits, especially when focusing on fresh, fall produce. These foods are naturally rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals that support heart health, reduce inflammation, and maintain overall wellness which is particularly important for seniors.

Tips for Selecting Fall Produce:

- *Look for vibrant colors and texture. Avoid dull or faded produce.
- *Smell the produce. For instance, good potatoes have an earthy and starchy smell.
- *Check for signs of ripeness. Avoid bruises or blemishes.
- *Shop at farmer's markets or buy local for the freshest options.
- *Don't be afraid to ask for advice from farmers or store staff.

Preservation Techniques:

- ***Freezing:** Preserve the freshness of your harvest of fruits and vegetables. For vegetables, blanch them first to retain color, texture, and flavor.
- ***Canning:** Store produce long-term in your pantry using hot water bath canning for fruits and some vegetables, or pressure canning for meats and many vegetables.

- ***Drying/Dehydrating:** Create healthy snacks like dried apple rings using a dehydrator or oven. This method concentrates flavors and extends shelf life.
- ***Pickling:** Transform vegetables like cucumbers, green beans, or beets into flavorful quick pickles with a vinegar-based brine.
- ***Jamming:** Turn fruits into delicious jams and jellies by cooking them with sugar. Be sure to use appropriate pectin or thickeners and follow recommended canning procedures for shelf stability.

For those who enjoy cooking, fall offers an array of simple, delicious recipes featuring the best of the season's produce. These minimal ingredient recipes are not only easy to prepare but also packed with the nutrients your heart needs.

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup

Ingredients:

- Butternut squash-2 pounds, cubed
- Olive oil 2-4 tablespoons
- Vegetable broth (low sodium)- 4 cups
- Onion- 1 medium, diced
- Garlic (optional), 4 cloves, diced
- Nutmeg- 1 teaspoon- to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Peel and chop the butternut squash into cubes.
3. Toss with olive oil and roast for 20-25 minutes until tender.
4. In a pot, sauté diced onion and garlic until soft.
5. Add roasted squash and low-sodium vegetable broth, simmering for 10 minutes.
6. Blend until smooth, season with nutmeg, and serve warm.

Baked Apples with Cinnamon and Honey

Ingredients:

- Apples (cored)
- Cinnamon
- Honey

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Core apples and place them in a baking dish.
3. Sprinkle cinnamon over each apple and drizzle with honey.
4. Bake for 25-30 minutes until tender.
5. Enjoy as a healthy dessert or snack.

References:<https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/foodcooking/recipes>,<https://www.bannerhealth.com/healthcareblog/teach-me/pumpkins-and-6-other-nutritious-fall-foods-to-try>, <https://www.eatright.org/food/food-groups/vegetables/9-fall-produce-picks-to-add-to-your-plate>, <https://www.weareac.org/news/the-origins-of-harvest-at-aberdeen-cyrenians>

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