How to Get the Most from Delicious Fall Produce

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Shorter days and cooler nights herald a change of season and delicious new ways to plan our menus. Soups, stews and casseroles make a healthy comeback, and our culinary palette turns from the watercolors of summer to the deeper shades of autumn. Just take a stroll through your local market and you'll find burgundy-colored beets, juicy golden pears, and a whole host of hardy, vitamin-rich produce – gifts from Mother Nature as we bid the warmer months a fond farewell.



Whether you enjoy a leisurely relationship with your stove or prefer a quick-to-the-table approach, here are some of fall's finest gems and some easy ways to incorporate them into a healthy diet.



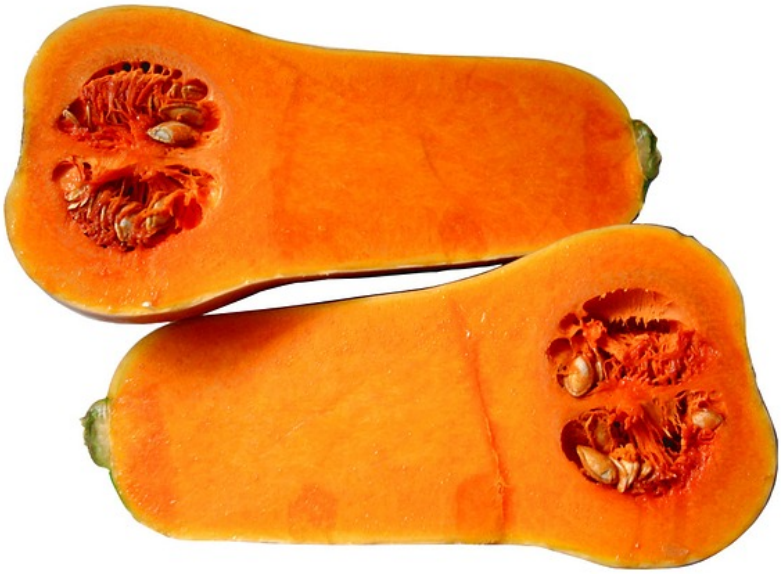
Apples
Rich in fiber and vitamin C, apples are freshest and most plentiful from August through November. Tart and tasty Granny Smith and Rome Beauty hold their shape when cooked and are well-suited for pies and crisps. Sweeter apples, like Gala and Fuji, are good to munch on or tossed as part of a nutritious salad. Jonagold and McIntosh make excellent applesauce, while Gravenstein is perfect for baking whole.

For a change of pace, try roasting pork chops with sliced apple, a sprinkle of cinnamon and a splash of cider. Combine chopped apple with cooked turkey, a dab of mayonnaise, and slivered almonds for a delicious sandwich filling.



Cranberries
Cranberries are harvested in September-October and their peak-selling season is between

Halloween and Christmas - just in time for all of those delicious holiday recipes. Rich in antioxidants and natural antibacterial properties, this cousin to the blueberry joins the class of ‘super foods’ considered superior in nutritional benefit.
Cranberries make an excellent side-kick to that Thanksgiving turkey, but they are also a fine addition to a baked apple crumble. To dress up a savory pilaf, add cranberries to brown rice, pine nuts, orange peel and broth.



Winter Squash
Once the evenings cool down and more dishes make their way to the oven, the versatile winter squash should find a respectable place at the table. High in vitamins A, C and potassium, the most popular butternut and acorn varieties are at their peak between early fall and winter.
Loaded with natural sweetness, winter squash roasts beautifully with parsnips, leeks, turnips, whole garlic cloves, and fresh herbs. Baked alone, squash makes a wonderful stand-in for potatoes. Simply cut in half, scoop out the seeds, drizzle with melted butter, and season to taste.



Pumpkins

You know fall has arrived when those large Halloween pumpkins start lining up in front of your favorite grocery store. While you'll certainly want to choose just the right shape and size for carving, these lovely giants are strictly for show. Small cooking pumpkins like Pie, Sweet or Jack-Be-Little are loaded with the antioxidant beta-carotene and are extremely versatile in cooking and baking.



Each pound of pumpkin (after roasting or boiling) will yield approximately one cup of puree. For a rich, hardy soup, pumpkin pairs beautifully with chicken stock, cream, and fresh herbs. For cookie lovers who are watching their cholesterol, pumpkin makes an excellent replacement for butter or margarine, especially when combined with heart-healthy oatmeal, raisins, cinnamon and nutmeg.



Cabbage
Though available year round, the versatile, pungent cabbage is harvested, locally, in late fall. This hardy, cruciferous vegetable is packed with vitamin C and noted for its high content of the phytochemicals, sulforaphane and indole, which help prevent the growth of cancer cells. Often overlooked and underutilized, cabbage adds flavor and texture to a wide variety of recipes.
For a quick, satisfying main dish, try sautéing shredded cabbage with onions and slivers of Canadian bacon. Create a crisp, Asian-inspired salad, by tossing green and red cabbage with scallions, cucumbers, cooked chicken, and sesame-ginger dressing.

In the coming weeks, grocery shelves will be full to the brim with a bounty of fresh, seasonal treasures, and you'll find some of the year's best prices on fall produce. Just remember to pair fruits and vegetables with a healthy amount of whole grains and a good source of protein - for a delicious, well-rounded meal.

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