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chy, cactus leaves are said to combine the flavors of green pepper, string beans, and asparagus.

Matelson describes them as "slimy, like okra." Okra lovers, this one's for you!

■ Bananas. A much richer banana flavor than the yellow fruit we're used to. The red banana is very sensitive to cold and develops black spots when chilled, but the spots won't affect the flavor.

Hardness is an indication of freshness in red bananas. They keep better than yellow bananas. Matelson suggests that you peel a red banana, freeze it, and eat as a snack in hot weather.

■ Plantains. In their native countries, plantains are used more like a vegetable than a fruit; they're usually baked or fried, and served like potatoes. They are not suitable for eating raw unless they're very ripe, when they turn completely black.

■ Cheromoya. The name comes from the ancient Quechua (Incan) language, making cheromoya the oldest recorded New World fruit. The plant has been cultivated for centuries in Central and South America and the Caribbean, primarily for local use. Most of the Cheromoya sold in the United States is imported from Chile, where they are grown on trees that

peak in production at the age of 50. (Trees established in California are only 14 years old.)

But there's a catch, cheromoya is fertilized in tropical climates with the help of insects that are not found in North America. This means that the California crop has to be fertilized by hand. When you consider that a mature tree can produce 1,000 pounds of fruit, with the help of a whole lot of little tiny paint brushes, you'll understand why cheromoya are somewhat costly.

However, the flavor has been described as a mixture of mango, pineapple, papaya, and vanilla custard, and it doesn't cost any

more than "gourmet" ice cream, so it's worth a try. Serve chilled.

■ Sunchoke. Also known as Jerusalem artichoke. Sunchoke are related to sunflowers, and in 1605 French explorer Samuel de Champlain sampled the vegetable, which was cultivated by Native Americans in Massachusetts, and reported that it tasted like artichokes. Beneath their knobby, brown-skinned exterior, sunchoke have crisp, white flesh with a mellow, nutlike flavor. You can enjoy them raw or cooked, hot or chilled.

Sunchokes make a good substitute for water chestnuts in salads and stir-fry combinations.

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ing common, and many more of them will be in the near future. It's important to constantly update your knowledge — something like this seminar is wonderful. Look at how many people are here to learn about new fruits and vegetables. That proves that people are interested in varying their diets."

Certified Master Chef Milos Cibulka, of The Golden Mushroom, in Southfield, serves exotic fruits and vegetables only when they're available in peak condition. "I'm not interested in how pretty or exotic they are," said Milos, "if it doesn't taste good, forget it. As these

unusual fruits and vegetables become popular with the general public, the quality in general improves. Many of them are being grown in Florida or California now, so they can be left on the tree longer and harvested when they're in their prime. Shipping time is shorter, so they reach the market when they're still fresh.

"It's great that supermarkets are carrying produce that they would never have considered just a few years ago. The public is aware of items like arugula, anise bulbs, and exotic mushrooms. In just a few years, these 'exotics' have become commonplace."

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■ Invest in a large non-stick skillet. I never use oil or cooking spray in mine. Most foods have enough naturally occurring fat in them that extra oil for browning or cooking is not necessary.

A one-second spray of vegetable cooking spray contains about 2 grams of fat.

When you need to sautee veg-

tables, use the non-stick skillet with a ¼ cup of water or defatted chicken broth. This will work just as well as oil, but drastically reduce the fat.

■ Substitute imitation powdered butter for butter. Imitation powdered butters are wonderful. A few sprinkles in the water you are cooking your vegetables in will

add a nice buttery flavor without all the unwanted fat. I sprinkle imitation powdered butter on mashed potatoes, popcorn and cooked vegetables.

Send recipes to be considered for makeovers to Keely Wygonik, Taste/Entertainment Editor, the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers,

36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or fax recipes via 691-7273.

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Orange marmalade adds zest to stir-fry

AP — Orange marmalade adds flavor to shrimp and vegetable stir-fry. This dish includes peppers and broccoli, seasoned with garlic, ginger and hot pepper sauce.

SHRIMP AND VEGETABLE STIR-FRY

- 1 cup orange marmalade
 - 3 tablespoons soy sauce
 - 2 tablespoons white vinegar
 - 2 teaspoons hot pepper sauce
 - 1½ tablespoons cornstarch
 - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 - 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, chopped
 - 1 tablespoon fresh garlic, chopped
 - 24 fresh jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
 - 1 red bell pepper, chopped
 - 1 yellow or green bell pepper, chopped
 - 3 cups broccoli florets (about 1 bunch)
 - ½ cup water
 - 1 cup scallions, chopped (about 1 bunch)
- Combine the orange marmalade, soy sauce, vinegar, hot pepper sauce

and cornstarch in a small bowl. Stir to dissolve the cornstarch; set aside.

Place a large skillet or wok over high heat. Heat the pan for 1 minute, then add the vegetable oil. Heat the oil for 30 seconds, then add the ginger, garlic and shrimp. Stir-fry the shrimp for 2 to 3 minutes until they begin to turn rosy pink in color. Remove the shrimp from the pan; set aside.

Add the peppers and broccoli to the pan; cook over high heat for 1 minute. Add ½ cup water, cover the pan and reduce heat to medium. Cook the vegetables 4 to 5 minutes, until tender.

Uncover the pan. Return the heat to high. Add the shrimp mixture. Cook the shrimp for another 2 minutes until the sauce is thickened and the shrimp are completely cooked. Correct the seasoning with salt and pepper as needed. Stir in scallions; serve with boiled rice. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 278 cal., 6 g fat, 69 mg chol., 633 mg sodium, 12 g pro., 47 g carbo.

Recipe from: The J.M. Smucker Co.

Vegetables, chicken simply seasoned

AP — Slender, tender stalks of asparagus, green and white leeks, squash and carrots all add a breath of spring to succulent chicken. Because fresh flavors taste best when simply seasoned, a delicate yogurt topper is all that's needed.

CHICKEN AND VEGETABLES WITH YOGURT SAUCE

- 1 small yellow summer squash
- 1 small zucchini
- 1 large leek
- 1 large carrot
- 2 to 3 teaspoons margarine or butter
- 1 to 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves (4 ounces each), pounded lightly

- ½ cup dry vermouth
- 6-ounce carton plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons snipped fresh chives
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- ½ teaspoon ground red pepper or bottled hot pepper sauce
- 12 stalks fresh asparagus

Trim ends from squash and zucchini, remove seeds and cut into julienne strips (about ¼ cup each). Cut leek and carrot into julienne strips (about 1 ½ cups each).

In a large skillet melt 2 teaspoons margarine or butter over medium heat. Add garlic; cook about 30 sec-

onds. Add carrot; cook and stir for 1 minute. Add squash, zucchini and leek. Cook and stir for 3 to 4 minutes or until crisp-tender. Remove vegetables and keep warm.

Add chicken to skillet. Cook about 8 minutes or until no longer pink, turning once (add remaining 1 teaspoon spread, if necessary). Remove from pan and keep warm.

For sauce, add vermouth to pan. Deglaze pan with vermouth by heating until vermouth comes to boiling; simmer about 1 minute, stirring and scraping pan. In a small mixing bowl combine yogurt, chives, cornstarch and red pepper. Add to skillet. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly; cook and stir

for 2 minutes more. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, in a small skillet cook asparagus, covered, in a small amount of boiling water about 5 minutes or until crisp-tender; drain. Divide squash mixture among four dinner plates. Top with asparagus spears. Place chicken on vegetables. Spoon yogurt sauce over all. Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 258 cal., 6 g fat, 73 mg chol., 32 g pro., 16 g carbo., 2 g fiber, 150 mg sodium. RDA: 21 percent calcium, 16 percent iron, 43 percent vit.A., 40 percent vit.C, 19 percent thiamine, 27 percent riboflavin, 87 percent niacin.

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