

# Summer provides opportunity for vegetable adventures

Eating the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day should be a cinch these days as crops begin to come in and quality produce abounds. Things can get a bit boring, however, when we fail to step outside the realm of lettuce salads, apples, bananas and oranges.

This is the time to explore your produce section and sample those items not easily found every day of the year.

It's not unusual now to find three or more varieties of peppers, a half dozen types of squash and an astounding array of highly nutritious greens, tubers and tropical fruits like mangoes, papayas and guavas at the market. Ethnic markets expand options even more.

An unusual way to perk up salads is with arugula, a tender mustard-flavored green that is standard in salads from Italy, southern France and Greece. It is sold in small bunches with roots attached and should be bright green with no sign of yellow or limpness. Arugula adds verve to lettuce salads and is particularly good when served with citrus fruits. Use it in pasta dishes and stir fries too, it's an excellent source of vitamins A and C and iron.

Chayote is pear-shaped with furrows running its length. It varies in color from alabaster to dark green, but it is usually a pale to apple green. The flesh is crisp with a taste and consistency comparable to cucumber and zucchini.

Look for chayote that is firm and unblemished and use it like any summer squash. It blends well with seafood or ham for a casserole. It is a good source of potassium and fiber.

Plantain, the cooking banana, is a staple starch food in Central and Latin America. It can be eaten in every stage of ripeness. When the peel is green to yellow, the flavor is bland and its uses are similar to that of a potato. When the peel is yellow-brown through black, plantain plays the role of both fruit and vegetable, having sweetness but keeping a firm shape when cooked. Plantain is rich in potassium and a good source of vitamin C and beta-carotene.

Kiwi fruit, the size and shape of a large egg, has a unique tart-sweet taste that contains an element of citrus, strawberry and melon. Beneath its fuzzy brown skin is a bright green fruit that is delicious — either unpeeled, cut in half and scooped out with a spoon, or peeled and sliced into canapés, added to fresh fruit salads and green salads, or combined with seafood, chicken or ham. Kiwi is a great source of potassium and vitamin C.

Kiwi Sorbet is a nutritious and cooling refresher after any meal, or just for a summer snack.

## KIWI SORBET

1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup water  
1 1/4 cup peeled, sliced kiwi fruit  
(4 to 5 kiwis)

In a 1-quart saucepan, combine the sugar and water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Boil until the mixture is reduced to a half cup (about 5 minutes); remove from heat and let cool.

Whirl the kiwi fruit in a food processor or a blender until you have a cup of puree; mix with the sugar syrup and pour into a 9-inch square pan. Freeze until almost firm (about 1 hour), then break the fruit mixture into small pieces. With an electric mixer or food processor, mix just until the sorbet is soft and slushy (do not over-process). Wrap air-tight and freeze until ready to serve. Makes four servings.



Cool kiwi: Many different types of fruits and vegetables are available during the summer months making treats like this kiwi sorbet possible.

While these treats are great, there are plenty of other more common items in your produce section that haven't been tried. All of these are low in fat or have no fat and make super summer meals or side dishes.

Zucchini has become a favorite for many home gardeners. It's a good source of vitamin C and can be used in baking and served alone. Make sure the zucchini is firm-fleshed and glossy. It should have a small stem and no wrinkles at the ends. Best flavor will be found in zucchinis up to 7 inches in length and do not remove seeds as they are the most flavorful part of this squash.

Acorn, buttercup and butternut squash are also plentiful in the summer season and are great meal-makers. Squash with a tan, cream or orange skin should have no hint of green and once it is cut it should be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and stored in the refrigerator.

Squash can easily be prepared in the microwave by splitting in half, scooping out the seeds and lightly sprinkling with brown sugar. Place plastic wrap over the top of the squash and microwave 5 to 8 minutes on high for 1 pound of squash. Let set for 5 minutes before eating.

Here are some more vegetable recipes from Laura's Fat Free Kitchen, based in Livonia.

## RICE-STUFFED PEPPERS

1 cup rice  
2 1/2 cups vegetable broth  
1 large onion, chopped  
3 medium carrots, shredded  
1 cup frozen peas  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley  
1 1/2 cups shredded fat free cheddar cheese  
30 ounces low sodium stewed tomatoes  
2 medium red peppers  
2 medium green peppers  
2 medium yellow peppers  
Combine rice and broth in a medium saucepan. Heat to boiling, reduce heat and let simmer for 1 hour. Sauté onion and carrots until soft.

## MICROWAVE VEGETABLE MEDLEY

1/2 small bunch of broccoli  
1/2 small head cauliflower  
2 carrots, sliced  
4 ounces Cheddar cheese pods  
1/2 teaspoon black pepper  
1 red pepper, cut into strips  
Cut broccoli up into bite-size pieces. Discard tough ends of stems. Peel remaining stems and cut into half-inch thick pieces. Cut cauliflower into bite-size pieces. In a 2 1/2-quart covered casserole, cook carrots and 2 tablespoons of water on high in the microwave. Add broccoli, cauliflower, pea pods and pepper. Cook covered for 4 minutes, stirring halfway through. Add red peppers; cook, covered, 4 to 8 minutes until tender crisp.

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