

Fall Foods to Add to Your Plate

Fall is the perfect time to celebrate seasonal fruits and vegetables that are nutritional and delicious to enjoy this time of year. Head to the local markets in the area and the grocery stores and fill your grocery basket with these fall favorites.

Pumpkin – Pumpkin has a lot of dietary fiber and beta-carotene, which provides it vibrant orange color. Beta-carotene converts into vitamin A in the body, which is good for your skin and eyes. To balance pumpkin's sweetness, try adding savory herbs such as sage and curry.

Beets – Beets are edible from their leafy greens down to the root bulb. The leaves are like spinach and are delicious sautéed. Red beets are the most popular and what you see in the grocery store. More interesting varieties include golden or bull's blood, which has a bullseye pattern of rings. The red color in beets is caused by a phytochemical called betanin, making beet juice a natural alternative to red food coloring. Beets are a source of naturally occurring nitrates and may help support healthy blood pressure. Roasting or steaming beets whole takes the fuss out of peeling. The skin easily slides off after cooking. They are delicious raw, shredded and tossed in salads or thinly sliced and baked into chips.

Sweet Potato – They are full of dietary fiber and vitamin A. Sweet potatoes also are a good source of potassium and vitamin C. Try them as a breakfast side dish or serve them at any meal.

Pears – When we can buy fruits year-round, we tend to forget they have seasons. Pears are the most delicious in the fall when they are at their peak. Pears are unique in that they do not ripen on the tree; they will ripen at room temperature after they are picked. How do you know when they are ready to eat? Check the neck. If the fruit near the stem gives a little pressure, it is ripe. There are a wide variety of pear flavors and textures. Just like apples, some are excellently eaten fresh while others are best cooked or canned. Try pears on the grill, poached with red wine, or simply sliced with cheese. If you eat the peel too, on medium pear has 6 grams of fiber.

Okra – Most people eat okra fried, but it is also wonderful other ways. Around the world, chefs cherish the thickening properties of the see pods in dishes from Louisiana gumbo to Indian curries and other stews. If you wish to minimize the thickening property, try okra briefly stir-fried. The pods are high in vitamins K and C, a good source of fiber, an excellent source of folate and low in calories. At the grocery store, look for pods that are no longer than 4 inches and are bright green in color and firm to the touch.

Parsnips – Parsnips are cousins to carrots. They have the same root shape, but with white flesh. They are usually eaten cooked, but also can be eaten raw. One half cup of cooked parsnips is full of dietary fiber, about 3 grams per serving). They also contain more than 10 percent of the daily values of vitamin C and folate. Try parsnip roasted, pureed into soup, or mashed. You can eat top a shepherd's pie with mashed parsnips instead of mashed potatoes.

Cranberries – Fall is the time to get to know these tart berries and the wealth of nutritional benefits they provide. Fresh and dried cranberries pair well with a variety of meats and poultry. Fresh cranberries can be eaten raw but often are cooked. Dried cranberries are delicious in grain and vegetable salads and make a healthy snack on the go.

Source: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.