



Simple Seasonal Meals

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Introduction

Every fruit or vegetable grown in the home garden reaches its peak at a certain time. Harvesting and eating produce at its peak provides many benefits. The color, flavor, texture, and nutritional value increase as produce ripens. And eating seasonally costs less during the normal growing seasons. By choosing fruits and vegetables in season you get all of the benefits — food that tastes good, is good for you, and is reasonably priced.

The Choose MyPlate method for healthy eating stresses that half of your plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are chock full of nutrients. The colors of fruits and vegetables are indicators of phytochemicals — chemicals such as lycopene, lutein, and quercetin — that plants produce. These chemicals are studied for their health benefits and the message is clear — eating a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables is an easy way to enjoy the goodness of the wide array of nutrients while contributing to a longer, healthier life.

A Look at History

Eating locally grown food was the norm for earlier generations. Today, the produce from your local grocery chain, whether it is organically or conventionally grown, travels on average 1,500 miles from the farm to your plate. There are several reasons this is cause for concern:

- In most cases, the farther your produce travels the less nutritious and tasty it is by the time you eat it.
- Even though the grocery store appears to have a wide variety of produce options available, their focus is on varieties that travel well and have a longer shelf life.
- Needlessly transporting produce all around the globe wastes natural resources and harms the environment.

Fresh from the Farm

It is getting easier to pile your plate with seasonal food year round. Whether you plant your own garden



or let someone else grow it, eating fresh from the farm is worth the effort. Colorful seed catalogs arrive in the mailbox during the cold winter months, piquing the interest of gardeners everywhere. Depending on the climate in your area, planting a garden generally begins around the middle of March and can continue throughout the growing season.

There are many ways to embrace the idea of eating with the seasons. Here are a few.

Grow a garden. Nothing is more in season than the produce you grow, and you do not need a lot of space or a green thumb to do it. Start with seedlings of easy-to-grow vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, or cucumbers and transplant to your garden when soil temperatures reach around 45° F and the chance for frost is reduced. Exact soil temperatures differ, depending on whether you are planting cool-season or warm-season vegetables.

If your space is limited, consider planting herbs such as basil, mint, or parsley in pots on a patio or in kitchen windows with good light. You will get fresh, tasty seasonings that have more nutrients and other disease-fighting compounds than dried herbs in a little jar. Oregano, peppermint, and lemon balm, for

“Buying locally grown and in season produce has many benefits. Nutritionally, you get more ‘bang for your buck.’ Choosing to buy from your local farmers market allows you to purchase food that was picked in the last few days, if not hours, and is at its peak quality. Eating seasonally and locally gives you a broader variety of foods in your diet.

Who knew watermelon radishes were so good or carrots could taste like candy in the wintertime? Finally, it is just fun to try new foods that you may not have tried before.”

(Jay Sleichter, Jay’s Jellies, Produce and More, north central Kansas)



instance, lose about half their carotenoid (a heart-healthy chemical) when dried, according to a study published in the *Journal of Food Chemistry*.

A bonus is that gardening can be a family affair, creating a great way to exercise and be active. The excitement of young children who experience growing a garden can and does carry over to the kitchen and dining experience. Kids are more likely to try new foods that they have had a hand in growing.

Community gardens are becoming popular projects in many parts of Kansas. Grant funds may help offset some of the expenses of getting these gardens off the ground. Some community gardens rent a certain size plot to a family to care for in an area that has suitable soil and water available throughout the growing season. Other community gardens involve anyone who wants to volunteer to help with soil preparation, planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting throughout the year. The harvest is shared among the workers, with the excess produce shared with soup kitchens or community food banks. If you are interested in starting a community garden, check out the following information from the American Community Garden Association:

<https://communitygarden.org/resources/10-steps-to-starting-a-community-garden/>

Join a CSA. A regular (usually weekly or monthly) delivery of farm-fresh produce can be just the tool to get you eating in season. CSA stands for “Community Supported Agriculture.” In a CSA, you pay a fee for the season, essentially purchasing a share in a local farm. Then you receive an allotment of the farm’s bounty. Typically, the farmer delivers produce to a central location once a week and you pick up your share. You get to experience firsthand what is available at different times of the year. There is no guarantee exactly what you

will get each week since pests, weather, and other factors influence what grows. To find a CSA in your area go to <http://localharvest.org/csa/>

Frequent the farmers market. A weekly trip to your nearest farmers market is a simple way to stock up on seasonal groceries. Local farmers sell food as it becomes available and most times it is picked the same morning you purchase it. Markets are sprouting across the country, so you should be able to find a market close to you. Winter markets are available in some areas where produce is grown in hoop houses. Also, many preserved items, winter crops, meat, and eggs can be found at these winter markets. Check out this website to find a farmers market near you. <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>.

Preserve the Harvest

Take advantage of an abundantly producing garden or generous CSA share and find ways to preserve the harvest. Nothing sounds better than adding some home-grown canned green beans or tomato sauce to a pot of stew in the winter. Or perhaps you have a food dehydrator to preserve fresh herbs harvested at their peak. Preserving items in season can save money by not having to purchase out of season when produce is more expensive and harder to find. Whatever your method — canning, freezing, or drying — follow up-to-date food preservation practices. An excellent guide

that encompasses all types of preservation methods is *So Easy to Preserve* from University of Georgia Extension.

Recipes

“Working with fresh produce — chopping, mincing, slicing — can be renewing and nourishing, for those who partake of the results, as well as for those who prepare the recipes.” This quote by Nancy O’Connor, author of the *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*, emphasizes the need to get back to preparing simple, whole food, especially food that has been grown locally. There will be times during the harsh midwestern winter when you have to head to the grocery store for your fresh produce. That is OK. Just remember you still have choices. You can eat more of the root crops and bypass produce that is out of season and overpriced.

Spring Menu Suggestions

Spring has sprung! Gardens are being planted; the growing season is underway. In Kansas, asparagus and a variety of salad greens are the first produce available. Enjoy!

Marinated Pasta and Asparagus Salad

- 1 pound pasta (penne, bowties, spirals or other shape of your choosing)
- 2 cups sliced fresh asparagus
- ½ cup green onions, sliced diagonally
- 1 green or red pepper, cut in slivers
- ⅓ cup chopped black olives (optional)
- 6 tablespoons olive oil*
- 4 tablespoons herb vinegar or balsamic vinegar *
- 1 teaspoon each dried basil and oregano (or 2 tablespoons fresh herbs)
- ½ teaspoon salt

Several generous grinds of black pepper

Boil pasta until cooked but still firm. Rinse under cool running water, drain well, and set aside. Cook asparagus until just tender — crisp and still bright green. Rinse under cool, running water and set aside. Mix asparagus, green onions, green or red pepper, and black olives with cooled pasta and toss lightly with oil, vinegar, and herbs. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and chill thoroughly. Serves 8.

*10 tablespoons low-fat Italian dressing can be substituted for the oil and vinegar.

Nutrition information per serving, 8 servings per recipe:

183 calories; 3 g protein; 11.7 g total fat (1.8 g saturated fat); 16 g carbohydrates; 211 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Spring Strawberry and Spinach Salad

- 1 bunch spinach or mixed salad greens
- 10 large strawberries, sliced
- 1 small red onion cut into rings

Additional toppings may include:

- Green onion
- garlic (minced)
- Asparagus (blanched)
- Sunflower seeds
- Slivered almonds
- Cheese (grated)
- Cooked turkey (cut into strips or cubes)



Dressing:

- ½ cup pineapple juice
- 2 tablespoon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons lemon juice
- 1½ teaspoons poppy seeds
- ¼ teaspoon dried basil or 1 tablespoon fresh basil

Nutrition information per serving; 4 servings per recipe:

100 calories; 3 g protein; 4.5 g total fat (.5 g saturated fat); 12 g carbohydrates; 70 mg sodium.

(Source: *Simply in Season Cookbook*)

Summer Menu Suggestions

Summer sensations! The summer menu highlights locally grown produce as much as possible. According to the harvest calendar for this part of the country, it is the season for broccoli, bok choy, carrots, cauliflower, collards, cucumbers, cabbage, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, corn, and many kinds of squash. Fruits available from June through August include apricots, cherries, grapes, melons, peaches, and apples.

Sweet Melon Salsa

- 1½ cups finely chopped cantaloupe
- 1 shallot, minced
- ½ large green pepper, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro
- 1 or 2 hot peppers, seeded, and finely minced
- Juice of 1 lime (approximately 3 tablespoons)
- 1 teaspoon honey, turbinado, or brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Combine all ingredients. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. Yield: 2 cups.

Nutritional information per 2 tablespoons: 10 calories; 0

g protein; <1 g total fat (0 g saturated fat); 2 g carbohydrates; 35 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Frosty Cantaloupe Smoothie

- 2 cups cantaloupe chunks
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons sugar or honey
- 8 ice cubes

Place all ingredients in a blender and whirl until well blended. Pour into large frosty mugs. Serves 2.

Nutrition information per serving, 2 servings per recipe:

157 calories; 2 g protein; <1 g total fat (0 g saturated fat); 36 g carbohydrates; 15 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Pasta with Spicy Summer Vegetables

- 1 pound penne pasta*
- 3 ears of corn (or 1½ cups corn kernels, frozen or canned)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
- 1 green or red sweet pepper, chopped
- 1 or 2 hot peppers, seeded and chopped
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes, soaked in boiling water, drained and chopped
- 1 medium zucchini, chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, diced
- ½ cup white wine (water or vegetable stock may be substituted)
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro (more or less according to your taste)
- 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cook the pasta while you prepare the vegetable topping. If using fresh corn, cut corn from the ears and discard cobs. Set aside.

In a large skillet, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute. Add the sweet and hot peppers and sauté for 2 minutes. Add sun-dried tomatoes and zucchini. Sauté 2 to 3 more minutes. Add corn kernels, diced fresh tomatoes, wine or stock, and simmer 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in cilantro, basil, green onions, lime juice, salt, and black pepper. Simmer for 1 minute.

Serve over hot pasta. Delicious served with crusty French bread. Serves 6 to 8.

*Penne is thin tube-shaped pasta with diagonally cut ends. It is my preference for this recipe although other shapes will also work. Whatever shape you use, be sure to choose high quality pasta.

Nutritional information per serving, 6 servings per recipe: 224 calories; 6 g protein; 4.7 g total fat (<1 g saturated fat); 37 g carbohydrates; 368 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Fall Menu Suggestions

The fall menu includes some of the last of the summer-grown veggies and is full of colorful root vegetables, making for some tasty dishes. Root vegetables, if blemish free and stored properly, may be enjoyed for several months. Optimum temperature for storing root vegetables is 55 degrees.



Aztec Grain Salad

- 1½ cups quinoa, dry
- 1¾ cups fresh Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cubed to ¾-inch size
- 1¾ cups fresh butternut squash, peeled, seeded, cubed to ½-inch size
- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ cup frozen orange juice concentrate
- 1½ tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ⅓ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 dash ground black pepper
- 1 dash ground white pepper
- ½ teaspoon fresh cilantro, chopped
- ⅓ cup dried cranberries, finely chopped
- ⅓ cup golden raisins, seedless, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Rinse quinoa in a fine-mesh strainer until water runs clear, not cloudy. Combine quinoa and 3 cups water in a medium pot. Cover and bring to a boil. Turn heat down to low and simmer until water is completely absorbed, about 10 to 15 minutes. When done, quinoa will be soft and a white ring will pop out of the kernel. The white ring will appear only when it is fully cooked. Fluff with a fork. Cover and refrigerate. A rice cooker may be used with the same quantity of quinoa and water.

Combine apples and squash in a large mixing bowl. Add oil, ⅛ teaspoon ginger, and ¼ teaspoon cinnamon. Toss well to coat. Pour apple/squash mixture onto a large baking

sheet and place in oven at 400°F. Roast for 15 minutes or until squash is soft and slightly brown on the edges. Do not overcook. Remove and set aside to cool.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine orange juice, olive oil, honey, Dijon mustard, red wine vinegar, salt, peppers, cilantro, and remaining ginger and cinnamon; whisk together to make dressing.

Makes six 1-cup servings. Cooking time: 30 minutes.

Nutrients per serving: 298 calories; 6 g protein; 54 g carbohydrate; 6 g dietary fiber; 8 g total fat (1 g saturated fat); 58 mg sodium.

(Source: *USDA Food and Nutrition Service*)

Quick Grated Beets

4 medium sized beets

1 tablespoon butter or olive oil

1 to 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (to taste)

3 to 6 tablespoons water or vegetable stock

½ teaspoon salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Chopped fresh dill or parsley

Wash, peel, and coarsely grate beets. Heat butter or oil in a medium-sized skillet over medium low heat. Add beets, and stir to coat well. Sprinkle with lemon juice, cover, and cook for approximately 10 minutes. Stir occasionally and add water or stock as needed to prevent scorching. Cook until just tender. Season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with dill or parsley. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Nutrition information per serving, 4 servings per recipe:

48 calories; <1 g protein; 3.2 g total fat (1 g saturated fat); 4 g carbohydrates; 267 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Simple Preparation of Greens

Wash greens thoroughly — their curly, textured leaves often hold dirt. If the greens are large and mature, you will need to cut the leaves from the large stems. Younger greens can be cut up, stem and all. You can sauté greens lightly in a little bit of olive oil with a bit of minced garlic. There is usually just enough water clinging to the leaves from washing to help steam the greens. Add a splash of soy sauce during cooking. Cook greens until they are just tender but still colorful and alive. Mustard greens and collards have a slightly stronger flavor than chard or kale and may benefit from slower cooking in soups or broths to help mellow their sharpness.

Nutrition information per serving; 4 servings per recipe for kale with garlic: 50 calories; 3 g protein; 2.5 g total fat; 7 g carbohydrates; 260 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)



Gingered Apple Crisp

8 cups sliced, peeled apples (8 to 10 apples)

½ cup liquid fruit concentrate or undiluted apple juice concentrate

¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger root

Topping:

5 tablespoons melted butter

¼ cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

¼ teaspoon ground ginger

¼ teaspoon salt

1 cup crushed gingersnaps

2 cups quick-cooking rolled oats

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Place apple slices in an ungreased 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

Heat fruit or apple juice concentrate and grated ginger root in a small pan over medium heat until just simmering, about 5 minutes. Pour this liquid over the apples and stir to evenly distribute. Smooth apple filling evenly in pan.

Mix remaining ingredients thoroughly to create topping. Cover apples evenly with topping.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until apples are tender and topping is nicely browned. Serves 8 to 10.

Nutrition information per serving: 340 calories;

4 g protein; 11.3 g total fat (5.6 g saturated fat);

54 g carbohydrates; 190 mg sodium.

(Source: *Rolling Prairie Cookbook*)

Vegetarian Groundnut Stew

This dish was inspired by peanut stews served in West Africa.

- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups winter squash, peeled and chopped
- 2 cups cabbage, chopped
- 1 dried chili pepper or ground red pepper to taste
- 3 cups tomato juice (or pureed canned tomatoes)
- 1 cup apple juice
- 1 to 2 teaspoons ginger root, peeled and minced
- 1 to 2 cups green beans
- ½ cup peanut butter

In a large pan, sauté the onion and garlic in 1 tablespoon oil until translucent. Add winter squash, cabbage, and chili pepper; sauté until flavors are mixed. Add tomato and apple juice along with ginger root. Cover and simmer until squash is tender, about 20 minutes. Add green beans and simmer 5 minutes more. Stir in peanut butter and simmer at very low heat until ready to serve. Serve on top of brown rice or millet with toppings (optional): chopped green onions, parsley, cilantro, peaches or other fruit, crushed peanuts, flaked coconut. Serves 6.

Nutrition information per serving: 330 calories; 14 g protein; 9 g total fat (2 g saturated fat); 54 g carbohydrates; 530 mg sodium.

(Source: Simply in Season Cookbook)

Winter Menu Suggestions

For many people, winter means comfort food. You can still take advantage of seasonal vegetables and incorporate nutritious ingredients into winter favorites.

Short Grain Brown Rice with Squash

- 2 cups short-grain brown rice, rinsed
- 1 cup cubed winter squash
- 3 cups water
- 2 pinches of sea salt
- 1 tablespoon barley miso
- Minced parsley for garnish

Combine rice, squash, and water in a pan and cook uncovered over medium heat until mixture comes to a boil. Add salt. Cover and reduce to low heat, cooking for 50 minutes.

Meanwhile, puree miso in a small amount of water. When the rice is cooked, remove it from heat. Stir pureed miso into hot rice and transfer to a serving bowl. Serve garnished with parsley. Makes 5 to 6 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 190 calories; 4 g protein; 1.5 g total fat; 45 g carbohydrates; 20 mg sodium.

(Source: Cooking the Whole Foods Way)



Harvest Delight

- 1½ cups green apples, peeled, cored, diced to ½-inch size
- ⅓ cup fresh carrots, peeled, sliced in ¼-inch slices
- 1 cup fresh sweet potatoes, peeled, cubed to 1-inch size
- 1 cup fresh butternut squash, peeled, seeded, cubed to ½-inch size
- ⅓ cup fresh red onions, peeled, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano, chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh sage, chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh garlic, minced
- 2½ teaspoons maple syrup
- 1 cup fresh baby spinach, chopped
- ⅛ cup dried cranberries, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 425°F.

You may place diced apples in a small bowl of water with a squirt of lemon juice to prevent them from browning. Drain when ready to use.

Steam carrots in a steam basket over high heat for 10 minutes or until soft. Toss potatoes, squash, carrots, and red onions in a large mixing bowl with olive oil and salt.

Line a large baking pan with parchment paper and spray with nonstick cooking spray. Spread vegetables evenly on baking pan. Roast vegetables in 425°F oven for 25 minutes or until tender and slightly browned. Turn vegetables midway through roasting.

In a large mixing bowl, combine apples, thyme, oregano, sage, rosemary, and garlic.

Remove vegetables from oven and reduce heat to 400°F. Add apple mixture to vegetables, spread evenly. Return to the oven and roast for 15 minutes or until slightly tender. Remove from oven.

Drizzle with maple syrup and mix well. Return to oven. Roast for 8 additional minutes at 400°F until vegetables are fork-tender. Makes six ½-cup servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 93 calories; 1 g protein, 16 g carbohydrates; 3 g dietary fiber 3 g total fat (0 g saturated fat); 103 mg sodium.

(Source: USDA Recipes for Healthy Kids)



Recipes that span the seasons: An excellent Harvest Calendar for Kansans (shown on page 8) is available at <http://growinglawrence.org/harvestcalendar.html>. Following this calendar, the kitchen-tested recipes in this fact sheet will help you eat more seasonally.

Reviewers

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Secret Chocolate Cake

Delicious plain, frosted, or served in bowls with applesauce. They'll never know the secret ingredient unless you tell.

- 2 cups beets (peeled, chopped, and cooked)
- ½ cup applesauce
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup oil
- ½ cup plain yogurt
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup baking cocoa (sifted)
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla
- 1½ cups white flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)
- ½ cup chocolate chips and/or nuts (chopped)

Puree the cooked beets and applesauce in a blender until smooth. Set aside.

Combine sugar, oil, yogurt, and eggs in a large mixing bowl. Beat with electric mixer 2 minutes.

Add the cocoa and vanilla along with the pureed beet mixture. Beat another 90 seconds.

Gradually sift the flour mixture into the batter, mixing it in with a spoon but stirring only until blended. Stir in chips or nuts at the end.

Pour into a greased 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Bake in a preheated oven at 350°F until knife inserted in center comes out clean, 40 to 50 minutes.

Makes 24 servings

Summer variation: Substitute 2 to 3 cups shredded raw zucchini or summer squash for the cooked, pureed beets. Use the ground cinnamon and add ½ teaspoon ground allspice.

Nutrition information per serving: 170 calories; 4 g protein; 8 g total fat (1.5 g saturated fat); 23 g carbohydrates; 170 mg sodium.

(Source: Simply in Season Cookbook)

