Cooking Tips to Preserve Nutrients and Flavor in Foods

How you prepare and cook foods can affect flavor and nutrition. Nutrients in some foods (vitamin C, the B vitamins, and folate in particular) are lost by overcooking or simply allowing the foods to soak in water for too long. With just a few tips on food preparation and cooking techniques, you can maximize the nutrient quality and flavors of your foods.

Preparation

- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables with cool tap water. Be sure to wash clean thick-skinned vegetables and fruits, such as melons or squash, using a soft brush and water.
- Avoid soaking fruits and vegetables as you wash because some vitamins dissolve in water.
- Leave edible skins on vegetables and fruits (carrots, potatoes, pears, etc.) and trim away as little skin as possible. Most vitamins and minerals are found in the outer leaves, skin and areas just below the skin, not in the center. Peels also are natural barriers that help protect against nutrient loss.
- Cut vegetables that need to be cooked longer into larger pieces. With fewer surfaces exposed, fewer vitamins are lost.

Cooking methods that shorten the time, temperature, and amount of water used help to preserve nutrients.

- Cook vegetables or fruits in a small amount of water
- Steaming is a great way to cook vegetables quickly and retain valuable nutrients because vegetables usually don’t come in contact with cooking liquids.
- Microwave cooking is good as it uses little water and the cooking time is very short. Cover with plastic wrap or other top to keep the steam in.
- Stir-frying is another way to quickly cook a variety of vegetables.
- Don’t overcook vegetables. Short cooking times help vegetables retain nutrients and keep their bright color and flavor. Strong-flavored vegetables, such as Brussels

Attention Senior Citizens:

Have a nutritional question or concern? If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at

NY Connects

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments. For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).
Other Cooking Tips
- For beets and red cabbage, add a little lemon juice or vinegar to the cooking water to retain their bright-red color.
- Avoid rinsing grains like rice before cooking because nutrients may wash down the drain.
- Avoid overcooking meat by using a food thermometer to determine when it has reached a safe minimum internal temperature without overcooking.
- Canning is cooking, so canned vegetables don’t need to be cooked again. They would lose flavor and nutrients. Just reheat canned vegetables on the stovetop or in the microwave oven.

A Few General Guidelines for Storing Produce
- **Do not store fruits and vegetables together.** Fruits that give off high levels of ethylene (the ripening agent) can prematurely ripen and spoil surrounding vegetables.
  - **For Vegetables:** Before storing, remove ties and rubber bands and trim any leafy ends. Leave an inch to keep the vegetable from drying out. Make sure the bag you store the veggies in has some holes punctured to allow for good air flow. Pack vegetables loosely in the refrigerator. The closer they are, the quicker they will rot. Leafy greens can be washed before storing by soaking them in a sink full of water, while soft herbs and mushrooms should not be washed until right before they are used.
  - **For Fruits:** Non-cherry stone (pit) fruits, avocados, tomatoes, mangoes, melons, apples, and pears will continue to ripen if left sitting out on a countertop, while items like bell peppers, grapes, all citrus, and berries will only deteriorate and should be refrigerated. Bananas in particular ripen very quickly, and will also speed the ripening of any nearby fruits.

Cooking to Preserve Nutrients Word Puzzle

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NCJASTTSFKMHREK
ERSOPIXELIEOGQQ
SNIMATIVCAVQOYW
SKINSHSTARCZRA
NCWLZOTLPREHT
JQNHFWSFEEERNRE
JVC OA UWQVAWXIR
NZETVPTWMTFTTM
BEEPRESERVERSTRS
EXPOSURE
FLAVOR
HEAT
MICROWAVE
MINERALS
OVERCOOK
PRESEVERE
SKINS
STEAM
STIRFRY
VITAMINS
WATER
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Sources used for this handout:

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