

Beyond the Rainbow

Fresh ways to prepare fruits and vegetables

It's easy to get caught up in the same old routine. These ideas will help you liven up your menu.

Grilling

You can grill just about any vegetable — eggplant, tomato, zucchini, squash, bell pepper, mushroom, bok choy, endive, or asparagus. The flavors are intense off the grill. For most vegetables, you can simply half, cube, or slice them and place directly on the grill. It might be easier to handle and turn soft or juicy vegetables if you use a wire hinged basket. You can wrap potatoes and corn in foil and cook them right in the coals.

Vegetables grill best over medium heat, so let the coals cool down to the point where you can hold your hand over them to the count of 4. Cook 4-5 minutes each side and brush with salad dressing or olive oil to prevent drying. To save time, partially steam vegetables first then cook them for a few minutes over the grill. Or roast your vegetables under the broiler, if you don't want to

light up the barbecue. No matter which method of cooking you choose, be sure to make extra so

you have leftovers for tomorrow's veggie sandwich.

Fruit kebobs

You also can grill fruits on the barbecue — kiwi, papaya, cantaloupe, nectarines, peaches, and pears grill nicely. If you're using wooden skewers, soak them for 20 minutes in water beforehand to prevent burning on the grill. Lightly brush the kebobs with lemon juice or oil, then sprinkle with brown sugar and cinnamon, nutmeg, or ginger. Place the kebobs over the coals just as they're dying out and cook for 4-10 minutes until they're hot and slightly golden.

Vegetable purees

For a delicious and elegant change of texture, puree your vegetables. First cook the vegetables, then whirl them in a blender or food processor with a few tablespoons of cooking liquid or juice. Mix and match for added flavor and color — swirl purees of green beans, yams, turnips, or cauliflower into mashed potatoes or stuff purees of spinach or tomato into mushroom caps. Purees store nicely up to a week in the refrigerator. For healthy substitutions, use vegetable purees in place of mayonnaise on sandwiches or instead of gravies on meats, potatoes, and rice.



Trying new ways of preparing fruits and vegetables can help avoid boredom.

Fruit sauces

Melons, peaches, nectarines, apricots, berries, and others make tasty, colorful sauces. Except for apples, pears, and cranberries, you don't need to cook the fruit. Simply peel, slice, and pulverize. If you don't have any fresh fruit on hand, use plumped and stewed dried fruit such as apricots or pureed canned fruit such as peaches. Add a few tablespoons of sugar and some liqueur or vanilla extract and serve over frozen yogurt, fruit salad, or angel food cake. But they're not just for desserts — fruit sauces accentuate the flavors of meat, poultry, and fish.

Cold soups

A hearty bowl of hot soup and crusty bread make a soothing meal on a winter day. But have you tried cold soup to cool off on a hot day? Carrot, pumpkin, cucumber, beet, berry, or roasted bell pepper all make refreshing soups to help you beat the heat. It's as simple as mixing a vegetable or fruit puree with enough water, stock, and/or milk to make a soup. Just remember that cold soups need more seasoning than hot ones. Or try the traditional Spanish Gazpacho — a combination of tomato juice and chunks of cucumber, tomatoes, onions, and bell peppers with a bit of olive oil. Serve your favorite cold soup in a chilled

bowl or goblet for extra coolness. Except delicate fruit soups, you can prepare these a day or so in advance. They also freeze well, so be sure to make extra.

Salsas

Add some zip to your sandwich or grilled foods. Salsa means *sauce* in Spanish, but we use it to mean any fresh, chunky condiment — usually a mixture of chopped tomatoes, diced chiles and onions, minced cilantro or parsley, crushed garlic, and lime juice. Salsas also can be made with a variety of vegetables and fruit — red or yellow bell pepper, tomato, peach, orange, pineapple, mango, and papaya — in any combination.

Sorbets and granites

Leftover or overripe fruits such as persimmons, papayas, berries, plums, or peaches are the perfect ingredient for these luscious and refreshing desserts. Cut the fruit into chunks and let them stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Puree in a blender or food processor with sugar water (equal parts sugar and water cooked over medium heat). For best results, use 3 cups of puree to 1 cup of sugar water, then flavor with several tablespoons of your favorite liqueur or a teaspoon of lemon zest or vanilla extract. For a smooth sorbet, freeze the mixture in an ice cream maker

and follow the manufacturer's instructions. For a coarse granite, freeze the mixture in a shallow pan for several hours and whisk occasionally until it's slushy and ready to serve.

For more ideas on different ways to serve your favorite fruits and vegetables, visit the cooking section of your local bookstore.

Sassy Salads

Tired of the same old salad? Try something new and different. Just about any vegetable and/or fruit with a light vinaigrette or yogurt dressing can be served up as a salad. Or pair fruits and vegetables with contrasting colors, shapes, and tastes. Try these tasty combinations:

- Cooked red potato and yam cubes with dried cranberries
- Tomato and cucumber slices
- Papaya and black beans
- Spinach, mushroom, and orange sections
- Arugula, watercress, pear, and walnut
- Diced honeydew with raspberries
- Cubes of cantaloupe and seedless grapes
- Slices of unpeeled nectarines and red currants
- Mushroom caps and cherry tomatoes
- Cubes of cooked potatoes, yams, and peas.