

# Fun With Fruits and Vegetables

**F**ruits and vegetables don't have to hide in the bowl or crisper, nor do they have to just go from your kitchen to your dining room table. The brilliant colors and flavors of fruits and vegetables make them perfect as gifts and party favors. And with a little extra nudging, kids will enjoy them too.

## Gift baskets

A creative and healthful gift may be as close as your kitchen. Gift baskets are great for any occasion. Wrap them with colorful cellophane and tie them off with matching ribbon. Try these ideas:

- *Fruit 'a plenty.* Place a pineapple in the center of the basket and surround it with apples, bananas, grapes, kiwi, pears, oranges, dates, persimmons, and figs.
- *Cider delight.* Arrange 2 mugs, a bottle each of apple cider and orange juice, cinnamon sticks tied with decorative ribbon, and cloves wrapped in cheese cloth in a basket with a recipe for mulled cider.
- *Summer cool down.* Wrap some of your favorite kitchen tools — paring knife, strawberry huller, grapefruit knife, apple corer,

melon ball maker, and zester — with your favorite summer fruits in a colorful colander.

## Pot luck pleasers

Saying *yes* to a pot luck doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of time in the kitchen. A quick trip to the produce section will do the trick. Create your own veggie platter with baby carrots, precut broccoli, cherry tomatoes, and mushroom caps. Simply add a low-calorie dressing for dip. Marinate vegetables such as artichoke hearts, asparagus, mushrooms, red bell peppers, and hearts of palm for an easy antipasto dish. Easier yet, volunteer to bring beverages — juice, seltzer water, and a twist of lime make a refreshing drink. For extra fun, toss in some fruit-filled ice cubes. Just puree peaches, nectarines, or berries with lemon juice, pour the mixture into ice cube trays, and freeze.

## Lemon and orange aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of the fragrant, aromatic parts of plants to improve your health and well-being. The scent of lemon, for example, is uplifting and

energizing, which helps improve concentration. The aroma of oranges, on the other hand, is calming and affects mood — perhaps even lowering your blood pressure. Keep these scents around the house for yourself and use them as gifts.

## Fun for the whole family

The best way to ensure kids eat their fruits and vegetables is to make them fun and appealing. Kids like to dip their food, so serve fruits and vegetables with sauces. Experiment with frozen snacks — peas, corn, and berries just seem to taste better to kids when they're frozen. Color counts too — the brighter the better the appeal. Try these fun ideas:

- *Mix them in.* Peas into macaroni, carrot shreds into spaghetti sauce, and zucchini shreds into burgers or mashed potatoes
- *Start a veggie club.* List all vegetables from a to z and check off letters of the alphabet as your kids try them
- *Grow vegetables together.* Most kids will eat vegetables they grow
- *Read children's books featuring fruits and vegetables.* Then have your kids try foods from the stories.

