

FOOD FOR FITNESS AND FUN

April - 2009

Spring time is the beginning of really great fresh produce. This month: Green Beans and asparagus. Enjoy! Jan Temple

GREEN BEANS

Green beans, also known as string beans, are full of contradictions. They are not always green – they can be purple or yellow – and most modern varieties are missing the stringy fiber that used to run down the side of the pod. Today, green beans are commonly called snap beans because of the sound a crisp, raw bean makes when broken in two. Whatever you call them, these delicious beans are coming into season in your store.

CHOOSING FRESH BEANS:

- ◆ Look for beans with a bright color and smooth skin with a velvety feel.
- ◆ The beans may be rounder or flatter depending on the variety, but they should be thin.
- ◆ Length may differ with variety. It is a matter of personal preference more than of bean quality.
- ◆ Avoid beans that are discolored or lumpy. When the seeds are noticeable through the pod, the beans are probably old and tough.
- ◆ Fresh beans are available spring and summer.

STORING BEANS:

- ◆ Fresh beans should be wrapped in plastic and stored in the refrigerator.
- ◆ They will keep 4 or 5 days, depending on freshness at purchase.
- ◆ Don't cut the ends off the beans until ready to cook since this accelerates nutrient loss.

NUTRITION & HEALTH BENEFITS:

A half-cup serving of cooked green beans has only 22 calories, but it provides 2 grams of fiber as well as modest amounts of calcium, iron, potassium and vitamins A and C. Beans are also a source of lutein, a phytochemical that may help protect the eyes from developing macular degeneration. While green beans are technically legumes, they are nutritionally quite different from mature dry beans such as pintos, kidney beans or navy beans. These come from various field beans that grow on the plant to full maturity, when the plump seeds are removed from the pod and dried. The extra growing time allows the seeds to store many nutrients to nourish another growing plant.

PREPARATION:

Wash green beans and trim the tips before cooking. To keep the beans colorful, flavorful and full of nutrients, steam them just until crisp tender, about 5 minutes, or boil them uncovered in a small amount of water. Green beans can also be stir-fried in a small amount of oil until tender or steamed in the microwave. An unusual but delicious way to prepare green beans is to roast them. Preheat the oven to 450° F, toss the clean beans with just enough oil to coat and spread them in a single layer in a baking pan. Roast them until just tender, about 15 minutes, stirring once. Season with your favorite herbs.



TIPS FOR USING GREEN BEANS:

- ◆ Serve whole beans, raw or lightly steamed, on a vegetable platter with a lowfat dip.
- ◆ Don't know how many green beans to buy? One pound of fresh beans yields four cups.
- ◆ Green beans are fabulous in salads. Add them cooked or raw to tossed salads. Cooked green beans make a delicious addition to potato salad or pasta salad.
- ◆ Green beans are a tasty addition to soups, stews and casseroles.

Source: Communicating Food for Health, April 2003

SPRINGTIME ENTERTAINING

Take advantage of green beans and asparagus at festive occasions this spring.

- ◆ Use any one of the following dips/spreads with a vegetable platter. Serve the dips in a hollowed bell pepper or head of cabbage.
- ◆ Top a low fat whole grain cracker with a teaspoon of one of the dips and garnish with an asparagus tip or bean segment.
- ◆ Diagonally cut one inch slices of Italian bread; toast for 4 to 5 minutes, top with a dip or spread and garnish with an asparagus tip or bean segment to make a mock bruschetta
- ◆ Cover a tortilla or flattened slice of bread with one of the dips/spreads, top with several whole green beans or asparagus stalks, roll and cut into sections for a vegetable wrap (or call it mock sushi for fun.)

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ROASTED RED PEPPER DIP

MAKES 24 TABLESPOONS

8 oz (1 cup) Roasted Red Peppers, drain and blot with paper towel	1/2 teaspoon dried basil leaves or 8 fresh basil leaves
1 clove garlic	1 teaspoon lemon juice
1/2 cup fat free ricotta cheese	

Combine all ingredients and puree. Use as a dip with fresh vegetables.

Each 2 Tablespoon serving: 9 calories, 0.0 g fat, 0.0 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 2.5 mg cholesterol, 185 mg sodium, 1 g carbohydrate, 0.1 g fiber, 1 g protein. Cost/svg = \$.26

AWESOME BLACK BEAN HUMMUS

MAKES 24 TABLESPOONS

1-15 ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed	1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1 clove garlic	1 Tablespoon lime juice
1/4 cup vegetable oil	

Combine all ingredients and puree. Use as a dip with fresh vegetables.

Each 2 Tablespoon serving: 58 calories, 4.5 g fat, 0.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 60 mg sodium, 4.4 g carbohydrate, 1.5 g fiber, 1.3 g protein. Cost/svg = \$.10 (commercial product ~ \$.50/svg)

SUNFLOWER SEED CHEESE SPREAD

MAKES 24 TABLESPOONS

1 cup unsalted sunflower kernels	1 teaspoon paprika
4 oz. reduced fat cream cheese	1/8 teaspoon cayenne
1-2 Tablespoons water	1/2 teaspoon dried parsley

Combine all ingredients and puree. Spread on crackers or fresh vegetables. Note: sunflower seeds are rich in vitamin E.

Each 2 Tablespoon serving: 106 calories, 8.9 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 9.3 mg cholesterol, 61 mg sodium, 3.0 g carbohydrate, 1.3 g fiber, 4.6 g protein. Cost/svg = \$.10
Note: Goat cheese may be substituted for cream cheese – cost/svg = \$.44

ENJOY SPRING WITH ASPARAGUS

Asparagus comes from the same family as onions, leeks, and garlic. In the United States, the most popular variety of asparagus is green, but in many other parts of the world people prefer the white variety. The only difference between the two varieties is that the white asparagus has been kept covered from the sun. Asparagus needs to be exposed to the sun in order to turn green.

NUTRITION & HEALTH BENEFITS:

Asparagus is a low calorie food that is exceptionally rich in folate while also providing fiber, iron, vitamin C and B vitamins.

CHOOSING ASPARAGUS:

When choosing asparagus, look for firm, fresh spears with closed, compact tips. Avoid wilted, flat, or twisted stalks as they may be tough or stringy. Size is not directly related to quality. Spears may be thick or thin and still be excellent for eating. For even cooking, it is best that the spears be uniform. How much will you need to buy? Figure about 1/2 pound per person.



STORAGE AND PREPARATION:

The best way to store asparagus is to stand the cut end in one inch of water or wrap the ends in a damp paper towel and refrigerate. To trim asparagus before cooking or eating, hold a spear in both hands. Bend the stalk until it snaps. It breaks at the spot where it naturally begins to turn woody.

PENNE WITH SHRIMP AND ASPARAGUS

SERVES 4

This may be an expensive entrée to order at a restaurant, but by preparing it at home, you spend only \$1.68 per person for this main dish. To cut the cost, you could substitute cubed chicken breast for the shrimp.

1 cup whole wheat penne	8 ounces medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 Tablespoon olive oil	1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
2 cups sliced asparagus tops	1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
1/2 cup chopped red onion	14.5 ounce can diced tomatoes with basil, garlic, and oregano, undrained
2 minced garlic cloves	2 Tablespoons shredded fresh Parmesan cheese

1. Cook penne pasta according to package directions. Drain in colander.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add asparagus, onion, garlic, and shrimp; sauté for 5 minutes.
3. Add oregano, pepper, and tomatoes; cook over medium-low heat 3 minutes or until heated through. Stir in cooked penne; sprinkle with cheese.

Each 1-cup serving: 236 calories, 5.5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 88 mg cholesterol, 288 mg sodium, 27 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 18 g protein.

Source: *Communicating Food for Health*, April 2006
Cost per serving = \$1.68

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