

PICK A BETTER SNACK – ON THE GO!

May

Week One -

On the Go – With Asparagus!



This is National Family Week! Why not take the whole family to the grocery store and have each member pick out a new and different fruit or vegetable to try? Now that spring is in full swing, you should be able to find all sorts of freshly picked produce.

The word asparagus comes from the Greeks and means “sprout” or “shoot.” It’s believed that the first asparagus was harvested in the Mediterranean area of southern Europe. 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 favor 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.

When choosing asparagus, look for firm, fresh spears with closed, compact tips. Avoid wilted, flat, or twisted stalks 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 ½ pound per person. The best way to store asparagus is to stand the cut end of the vegetable 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.

Wash. Eat. (how easy is that?)

Take Asparagus With You!

- Though asparagus is usually eaten cooked, raw asparagus is just as tasty! Dip raw asparagus in low-fat dip for a crunchy snack.
- Spread low-fat cream cheese on your favorite crackers and top with pieces of asparagus.
- **Grilled Asparagus – Drizzle asparagus with a bit of olive oil. Wrap in foil and put it on a medium hot grill for 5-10 minutes. Garnish with toasted walnuts.**

Quick Nibble:

An asparagus stalk can grow up to ten inches in one day!

Week Two –

On the Go – With Spinach!



Spinach is a powerhouse vegetable, packed with important nutrients. Not only is spinach a great source of vitamins A, C and fiber, it also contains phytochemicals that fight to protect your health. In fact, the phytochemicals in spinach have been

shown to prevent eye disease. Although spinach provides iron and calcium, the minerals cannot be completely used by the body because it also contains oxalic acid which limits the absorption.

When buying spinach, look for clean, fresh and crisp leaves that have a rich green color. Avoid wilted spinach or spinach with long stems. Spinach should be stored in your refrigerator’s crisper. Don’t wash the spinach before storing it as it will hasten wilt and decay. If you purchase spinach in a cellophane bag, leave it in the bag until ready to use. If you purchase a bunch of spinach, wrap it in paper towels and place the wrapped spinach into a plastic bag and store in the crisper. Fresh spinach should keep for 3-4 days.

Wash. Eat. (how easy is that?)

Take Spinach With You!

- Spinach enhances finger food! Wrap pieces of cheese in spinach leaves for bite-sized treats.
- Add spinach leaves to your favorite deli sandwich for a boost of nutrients.
- **Sunny Spinach Salad – One bag fresh spinach leaves; one pint fresh strawberries, sliced; ¼ cup orange juice concentrate, thawed – but NOT reconstituted; 1/3 cup sliced or slivered almonds for garnish. Just before serving, toss spinach and strawberries with the OJ concentrate as the dressing. Garnish with almonds.**

Quick Nibble:

Persians were the first cultivators of spinach. They grew it to feed their long-haired cats. *The Great Food Almanac*

For snack and activity ideas for the other 11 months of the year go to:

www.extension.iastate.edu/food/

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Pick a better snack

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Week Three -

On the Go – With Rhubarb!



Rhubarb's tangy stalks make a natural pair with sweet fruits such as berries. Though it's actually a vegetable, rhubarb is often substituted for fruit in sauces, preserves and pies.

When choosing rhubarb, look for firm, straight stalks. Avoid rhubarb that is limp or discolored. Before eating rhubarb, remove the leaves since they are poisonous. Prepare rhubarb by cutting off the ends and removing any coarse strings, just as you would a celery stalk.

Wash. Eat. (how easy is that?)

Take Rhubarb With You!

- For a little zip, add slices of rhubarb to your favorite low-fat berry yogurt.
- Make a fruit cocktail snack by mixing rhubarb with a variety of fruits such as pineapple, berries and watermelon.

RHUBARB PEEKABOO – 16 Servings

So simple. So tasty. And low-fat, too!

18 ounce package white cake mix

4 cups diced rhubarb

1 teaspoon grated lemon rind

1 cup granulated sugar

Powdered sugar for garnish

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9x13 inch cake pan with cooking spray. Mix cake as directed on package and pour batter into prepared pan. Top with diced rhubarb and grated rind. Sprinkle granulated sugar over top. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes. Cake is done when center is lightly touched with fingertip and springs back. During baking, the rhubarb and sugar go to the bottom to form a sauce, and the cake rises to the top. Sprinkle top of cake with powdered sugar as a garnish. Serve warm.

Tip: If you don't have lemon rind on hand, substitute ½ teaspoon lemon extract.

Source: Vegetable Desserts, Schafer and Miller, Chronimed Publishing, ISBN 1-56561-135-7

Quick Nibble:

Rhubarb can be used to clean pots with burned on food. Simply rub rhubarb over the soiled area and your pots will shine in no time!

-- www.rhubarbinfo.com

For more information contact Jan Temple, CFCS, Nutrition Field Specialist, Iowa State University Extension, Housed in Johnson County Ph. 319-337-2145; FAX 319-337-7864; Cell 319-330-6175; E-mail: mjtemple@iastate.edu;

Web Site: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/food>

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Week Four –

On the Go – With Strawberries!



Memorial Day is a patriotic holiday in America. If you're heading to a picnic this week, take some strawberries with you. The berries make sweet, nutritious snacks you can take anywhere.

Strawberries are packed with nutrients. It's no wonder a recent national survey pegged strawberry lovers as "health conscious, fun loving, intelligent and happy." Did you know one serving of strawberries has 160 percent of the Vitamin C your body needs each day? That's more than an orange! Strawberries are also high in folic acid and dietary fiber.

When choosing strawberries, look for fragrant fruit with a bright red sheen. Avoid strawberries with green or white color and those that appear mushy. Strawberries should be refrigerated, but don't wash them until immediately before eating.

Wash. Bite. (how easy is that?)

Take Strawberries With You!

- Be patriotic and use the colors of the American flag as inspiration for a snack. Make fruit kabobs using strawberries, apples and blueberries.
- Strawberries are great in fruit smoothies. Prepare with yogurt for a calcium boost.
- For a quick mid-morning snack, eat some fresh strawberries. If you're on the go, take them with you in a plastic container or sandwich bag. You don't even need to worry about keeping them cool. Strawberries taste best when they're at room temperature.
- **Strawberry Smackers – Spread low fat or graham crackers with a thin layer of cream cheese. Top with sliced strawberries for a crunchy sweet treat.**

Quick Nibble:

There are exactly 200 seeds on every strawberry.

Fruits and vegetables are:

- *great tasting*
- *high in fiber*
- *low in fat and calories*
- *snackable.*