

BUY FRESH - BUY LOCAL

Food of the Week: Onions

Most researchers agree that onions have been cultivated for 5000 years or more. Onions may be one of the earliest cultivated crops because of being less perishable than other foods, were transportable, and could be easily grown in a variety of soils and climates.

In the Middle Ages, the three main vegetables of European cuisine were beans, cabbage, and onions. In addition to being a main food source, onions were used to alleviate headaches, snakebites, and hair loss. They were also used as rent payments and wedding gifts.

The first Pilgrims brought onions with them on the Mayflower. However, upon arriving in North America it was found that wild onion strains already grew here. Native American Indians used wild onions in a variety of ways including eating them raw or cooked and as a seasoning. It is recorded that bulb onions were planted as soon as the Pilgrim fathers could clear the land in 1648.

Onion Facts

Onions are available all year round with some varieties being more available at certain times of the year. Red, White, and Yellow onions are available all year with Red being more plentiful in the summer. Vidalia, sweet onions only grown in Georgia, are available May through November. Baby Vidalia, green onions, are available December through March.

When selecting onions, choose those with short, tight necks and dry papery skins. The onions should be firm with a minimum of spots or blemishes.

Onions should be stored in a cool, dry, dark place with good air circulation. They can be stored in a loosely woven bag, basket, or crate. Whole onions should keep for weeks if kept properly. Cut onions should be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator.

When cooking with onions the kind of dish being prepared will determine the type of onion to use. Red onions have a mild flavor and are good to use in potato salads, green salads, or sliced raw on hamburgers. They are also good grilled whole. White onions have a sweet flavor and can be sautéed for use in meat dishes. They also go well with Mexican dishes. Yellow onions have a tangy, sweet flavor. They are the most common onion and are good for all kinds of cooking including soups, meat dishes, and as a complement to vegetable dishes.

Onions are a very low-calorie food so are an excellent way to flavor foods. Research shows that onions may help guard various chronic diseases. This may be due to the generous amounts of a flavonoid called quercetin found in onions. Studies show that quercetin protects against cataracts, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

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Recipe of the Week: French Onion Soup

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 large yellow onions, sliced into rings
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 cups low-sodium, reduced-fat chicken broth
- 2 cups low-sodium, reduced-fat beef broth
- ½ cup water
- 1 teaspoon lite Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon ground thyme
- 4 slices French bread
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and halved
- 2 slices reduced-fat mozzarella cheese

Combine onions, garlic, and ¼ cup of the chicken broth in a large saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat for 25 minutes. Onions should be tender and golden brown. Add remaining chicken broth, beef broth, water, Worcestershire sauce, and thyme. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, toast bread slices under the broiler for 1-2 minutes on each side. Be careful not to burn them. Remove from oven and rub each piece of toasted bread with the cut sides of the garlic halves (keep broiler on).

Put soup into 4 oven-proof bowls. Place toasted bread slice in each bowl and top with ½ slice of cheese. Broil until cheese is melted. Serve immediately.

Nutrition Information per serving (approximately 1 cup soup):
228 calories (15.6% from fat), 4 g fat, 37.2 carbohydrate, 10.9 g protein, 276 mg sodium, 11 mg cholesterol

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