



Seasonal Eats



WHAT'S IN SEASON

March is National Nutrition Month, and what better way to celebrate than to add these nutritious, in-season vegetables to your meals!

- **Asparagus** - A springtime vegetable high in vitamins A, C, and K, as well as folate and fiber, asparagus has a delicate flavor and can be eaten raw or cooked. It is often grilled, roasted, or steamed.
- **Collard Greens** - A member of the cruciferous vegetable family, which also includes broccoli, cabbage, and kale, collards are a good source of vitamins A, C, and K, as well as calcium and fiber.

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FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES PROGRAM

WHAT'S IN SEASON?

- **Fresh Herbs** - Fresh herbs like basil, rosemary, thyme, and parsley add flavor to dishes and offer a range of health benefits. They can help reduce inflammation, boost immunity, and improve digestion.
- **Greens** - Common greens include kale, spinach, and Swiss chard. These vegetables are all high in vitamins and minerals, and they can be eaten raw or cooked. Greens are often used in salads, soups, and stir-fries.
- **Mushroom** - A type of fungus low in calories and fat, mushrooms are a good source of protein, fiber, and vitamins B and D. Mushrooms have a savory flavor and can be used in a variety of dishes, such as soups, stews, and stir-fries.
- **Peanuts** - A good source of protein, fiber, and healthy fats. They also contain antioxidants and minerals like magnesium and potassium. However, it's important to consume them in moderation, as they are high in calories.
- **Sweetpotatoes** - Versatile and nutritious vegetable, sweetpotatoes are rich in fiber, vitamin A, and potassium. Sweetpotatoes can help regulate blood sugar levels, improve digestion, and boost immunity.



KITCHEN TIPS AND TRICKS



Measure for Success - Believe it or not, the type of measuring cup you use is important. There are two important types - dry vs. liquid - and using the correct one for the ingredient you're measuring is key to successful baking. Dry measuring cups are commonly metal or plastic while liquid measuring cups are glass or plastic.

Dry measuring cups (and spoons) are meant for, you guessed it, dry ingredients. They can also be used for solid ingredients like mayonnaise, yogurt, and peanut butter, and thicker liquids like honey. Pro tip - when measuring out honey, lightly coat or spray the cup or spoon with oil for easier release.

When measuring dry ingredients, use the scoop-and-sweep method for the most consistent measurement. Using a spoon, scoop out the ingredient, fill a dry measuring cup, then sweep across the top with the straight edge of a butter knife or icing spatula to get rid of the excess. If you scoop the cup directly into the bag of flour, the flour will be packed and there will be more than the volume needed for the recipe.

KITCHEN TIPS AND TRICKS

Liquid ingredients are best measured at eye level. This is due to the “meniscus.” If you remember from science class, the meniscus is the curved surface of a liquid, and the bottom of the curve gives the most accurate reading. To measure liquids, place the measuring cup on a flat surface, bend down so you are eye level, then add the liquid until it reaches the desired measurement line.

Our neighbors across the pond favor measuring ingredients by weight. If you have kitchen scales, weighing out ingredients is the more accurate method of measurement, but don't feel the need to make a special purchase. The tried and true cups and spoons will continue to serve you well.



Keep It Spicy - Dried spices and herbs are a great, no-sodium way to add tons of exciting flavor to any dish. Freshness is important when using dried spices and herbs as this achieves the best flavor in your dish. Unfortunately, more often than we'd like to admit, the spices and herbs we don't use often end up getting pushed to the back of the spice cabinet or drawer, losing their potency. Here are a few tip and trick to get the most out of your spice and herbs and keep them from going to waste:



- As a general rule of thumb, whole spices and herbs are good for around 2 years, ground spices and herbs around 1 year.
- Buy what you think you'll use in the next few months (unless it's a spice or herb you use a lot of - for me, that's garlic powder). Buying smaller amounts more often will help ensure that you're using fresh, flavorful spices.
- Keep dried (whole, crushed, or powdered) spices and herbs in a cool, dark, dry space. Avoid storing near your stove - steam and heat can wreak havoc on your spices and herbs.
- Check to see if your spices and herbs are past their prime. How do you do this? Take a pinch of the spice or herb and crumble it into your palm. If it releases a strong aroma, the spice or herb is still good. If the aroma or color has faded, time to throw it out.
- Labeling in kitchen is super useful, especially labeling your spices and herbs. Do this by writing the date you opened the spices or herbs on a label, or piece of masking tape, and stick it to the container. Alternately, you can use a permanent marker to write the date directly on the container.
- Spices and herbs that come in bulk packaging or plastic bags, transfer them to a clean, dry, air-tight container. Again, write the date you opened the spice or herb as well as the name on a label or directly on the container.

LET'S COOK!

Gomen (Ethiopian-Style Collard Greens)

Source: EatingWell

This is a healthy take on a classic Southern side dish. It can even be eaten as a vegan main dish.

- 2 bunches collard greens (1 ½ - 1 ¾ pounds), stemmed and finely chopped
 - 1 cup minced red onion
 - 2 tablespoons water
 - ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons minced fresh garlic
 - 1 medium tomato, very finely chopped (almost pureed)
 - 1 medium jalapeño pepper, sliced
 - 1 teaspoon each ground cardamom and cumin
 - ¾ teaspoon sea salt
1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add chopped collards and cook until soft, about 15 minutes. Drain well in a colander.
 2. Add onion and 2 tablespoons water to the pot and cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the onion is translucent, 4 to 5 minutes. Add oil and garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add tomato and jalapeño; cook, stirring a few times, for 5 minutes. Add collards and stir, cover and cook, stirring once or twice, for 10 minutes.
 3. Reduce heat to medium-low. Stir in cardamom and cumin, cover, and cook for 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in salt.



Photo Credit: Eating Well

LET'S COOK!

Homemade Peanut Butter

Source: America's Test Kitchen

- 4 cups (1¼ pounds) peanuts
- 1 teaspoon honey, plus extra for seasoning
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt

You can use raw or preroasted peanuts, but do not use salted peanuts. Roasting the nuts before grinding them not only boosts their flavor but also warms their oils, allowing for faster breakdown during processing. (We also warm preroasted nuts for this reason.) You can customize your peanut butter by adding ¼ to ½ teaspoon of ground cinnamon, nutmeg, or ginger or ⅛ teaspoon of cayenne pepper to the peanuts before processing in step 2.

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Spread peanuts in a single layer on rimmed baking sheet and roast until fragrant and slightly darkened, 10 to 12 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through roasting. (If using preroasted peanuts, place in oven for 5 minutes to warm.) Transfer sheet to wire rack and let peanuts cool slightly, about 10 minutes.
2. Process peanuts in a food processor until oil is released and paste begins to form, scraping down sides of bowl often. Add honey and salt and continue to process to desired smoothness, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Season with extra honey and salt to taste.
3. If butter is thicker than desired, thin by adding vegetable oil, 1 teaspoon at a time, pulsing 3 times after each addition, until desired consistency is reached. If butter is thinner than desired, thicken by adding water, 1 teaspoon at a time, pulsing 3 times after each addition, until desired consistency is reached. Transfer to a jar with tight-fitting lid. Butter can be stored at room temperature or refrigerated for up to 2 months.

Water is used to thicken peanut butter because the proteins within it soak up the water, resulting in a thicker peanut butter. Adding oil does the opposite; it acts as a lubricant between the proteins causing them to "spread out," leaving a thinner peanut butter.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Small Flock Workshop – March 6, 6:30 p.m., Bladen Extension Office, 450 Smith Cr., Elizabethtown -- Learn about choosing breeds, incubating eggs, brooding chicks, nutrition for chicks and laying hens, and basic coop features. To register, call 910-862-4591 or email becky_spearman@ncsu.edu by March 4.

Lifelong Improvements *through* Fitness Together (L.I.F.T.) – Tuesdays and Thursdays, March 6 – May 1, 1 p.m., Bladen County Public Library, 111 N. Cypress St., Elizabethtown -- An 8-week group strength training program designed for all fitness levels and ages. Call Bladen Extension at 910-862-4591 or Bladen County Public Library at 910-862-6990 to register.

Reducing Sodium – March 11, 6 p.m., Bladenboro First Baptist Church, 500 S Main St., Bladenboro -- Learn about sodium – the good and the bad – and how to reduce sodium in your diet. Call Bladenboro First Baptist Church at 910-863-3618 to register.

Wildlife and Landowner Workshop – March 25, 9 a.m., Bladen Extension Office, 450 Smith Cr., Elizabethtown -- Topics include management techniques specific for wildlife benefits, timber management, and available cost-share programs. To register, call 910-862-4591 or email matthew_strickland@ncsu.edu by March 23.

For accommodations related to disabilities, contact Jessie Jones at 910-862-4591 or jessie_jones@ncsu.edu at least 7 business prior to the event.

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