



Fight Food Fatigue!

Bring new flavor to the table by using out-of-the-ordinary ingredients

WHEN THE CLOCK IS TICKING on the impending dinner hour and you're running low on time or creativity, it's easy to reach for the fail-safe ingredients you know and love: potatoes, rice, lettuce and corn. But why not spice things up—yes, sometimes literally—by incorporating new vegetables, flavorings or side dishes into your mealtime plan? We've rounded up a few contenders below. Remember: Spare the spud, and spoil the taste buds.

1. Swiss Chard

Spinach's hardier cousin, like kale and other sturdy greens, packs a bit more "bite," which mellows with gentle cooking such as steaming or sautéing. Serve it alone as a side dish, or incorporate it into soups, stews or pastas, where the wilted greens will add subtle texture along with vitamins and minerals.

Nutrition: One cup, when cooked, provides more than 200 percent of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin A, 50 percent of vitamin C and

700 percent of vitamin K. Plus, it's high in minerals such as iron, potassium and manganese.

Side dish: Strip the leaves away from tougher inside stems, then chop both groups roughly. Sauté stems in olive oil with minced garlic for three to four minutes, then add leaves, cover and cook until soft and wilted, about four more minutes. (A splash of balsamic vinaigrette before serving adds bright flavor.)

2. Anchovies

Don't be afraid of the fish: When chopped and sautéed in olive oil over low to medium heat, tiny anchovy fillets cook down and disappear, leaving only their sweet, salty sea flavor. While you're probably familiar with them as an ingredient in Caesar salad dressing, try mincing them and adding to tomato- or cream-based pasta sauces for an extra flavor boost.

Nutrition: Just 1 ounce provides 16 percent of a day's protein, 28 percent of niacin and 7 percent of both calcium and iron—at only 59 calories.

Picky Fingers

To introduce your little ones to new foods, the Mayo Clinic suggests talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture—not whether it tastes good.

Main dish: While pasta boils, chop a tin's worth of anchovies, then add fillets to a pan with a few garlic cloves, a half-pound of cleaned shrimp and a splash of olive oil. Cook over low heat until shrimp is opaque. When pasta is done, drain and return to the pot, then stir in shrimp mixture. Season with fresh parsley, a squeeze of lemon and shredded Parmesan cheese.

3. Turmeric

Turmeric gives ballpark mustard its golden hue (and often is added to egg salad for the same reason), but don't forget about its flavor! The warming spice is a frequent star in curry sauces, but can just as easily be sprinkled atop sautéed apples or cauliflower.

Nutrition: One tablespoon offers 16 percent of a day's iron and 6 percent of fiber. It's also been linked to lowered cholesterol.

Recipe idea: See "How Do I Use That?" at right.

4. Polenta

Create a creamy side dish by simmering this prepared cornmeal according to package directions with stock, cream or water—any will work, to varying flavor results. When refrigerated, the leftovers become firm enough to cut into bars or wedges, which can be baked and sprinkled with salt and pepper for the same taste in finger-friendly form.

Nutrition: One-third cup has 167 calories and provides 13 percent of your daily fiber.

Side dish: Trying to beat the clock? Instant polenta takes about one-third the time of regular.

5. Artichokes

We think of artichokes as vegetables, but they're actually the buds of a thistle plant. Preparing them from scratch can be time- and effort-intensive: Most cooks chop off the top one-quarter of the plant, snip off the end of each petal to remove thorns, then boil until a petal near the center pulls out easily (25 to 40 minutes). Luckily, most supermarkets sell jars of already-cooked petals in oil.

Nutrition: One artichoke offers 41 percent of the day's fiber, 27 percent of folate, 22 percent of vitamin K and 15 percent of vitamin C. Its high levels of the antioxidant silymarin help liver function and aid in breaking down fatty foods.

Recipe idea: See "How Do I Use That?" at right. —By Sam Mittelsteadt

How Do I Use That?

Turmeric

Create a simple, but flavorful dip for vegetables by mixing turmeric into low-fat mayonnaise and plain yogurt. And salt and pepper to taste. Then serve with raw cauliflower, jicama, celery and broccoli.

Artichokes

Be the hit of the party, with this impressive, but easy-to-fix dip. Combine cooked, chopped spinach and jarred artichoke hearts with softened cream cheese, sour cream, a sprinkle of crushed red pepper, and a dash of salt and pepper. Serve with crackers, toasted baguette slices or vegetables.