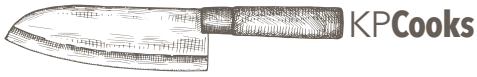


Color Your Holidays: Champion the Vegetables!



by Carolyn Benepe
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Nutrition guidance can seem near-ridiculous, ever-changing and easily dismissed. In mid-life I went back to college to study nutrition, it was years and years of chemistry and not too much about food. Luckily, I had previously worked in all capacities of the food business. My goal was to build a bridge between nutritional science and the culinary world, blending the sensibilities of both disciplines into delicious and nutritious food that fosters good health. I will always think of myself as a cook first, albeit also a registered dietitian/nutritionist, food and nutrition educator, and shameless advocate of fruits and vegetables.

Fill half your plate with vegetables. That's the dietary advice for people with diabetes and we would all do well to follow suit. I'm not saying that half your plate needs to be covered in broccoli unless that's your choice. You could have a serving of coleslaw and butternut squash or a tossed salad and roasted cauliflower, or maybe Waldorf salad and green beans. You get the idea: load up on vegetables, include them in every meal, even two or more varieties.

I can almost hear the collective groan just putting words to this concept. Still, I remain a champion for vegetable consumption. They are great sources of fiber loaded with good nutrition, anti-inflammatory vitamins, and are a significant part of all heart-healthy and diabetic-friendly menus. Vegetables and fruits can be locally grown, and with 1,097 vegetable species cultivated worldwide, and typically about 200 different items in the produce section, there are sure to be a few you can enjoy.

Hot and Spicy Vegetables

The vegetable choices can be what you most enjoy but for starters I'd suggest carrots, red potatoes and green beans since they take up the marinade nicely, have a variety of colors and shapes, and are good finger-foods. As an appetizer item, you will want to figure on one pound of vegetables for every six people.

Blanching vegetables is no more than steaming or boiling them until just tender and then plunging them into an ice bath to stop the cooking process and set the bright color.

Marinade:

- 1/3 cup light soy sauce
- 1/2 cup hot chili oil
- 1/3 cup toasted sesame oil
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 10 cloves garlic, minced

Vegetables:

- 1/2 pound baby carrots
- 1/2 pound green beans, ends trimmed
- 1 pound red potatoes washed and cut in approximately 1-inch pieces, or small new potatoes

Assemble marinade ingredients in container. Cover and refrigerate.

Boil a large stock pot filled two-thirds with water and set up a large bowl with ice water nearby.

Starting with the potatoes, cook in boiling water until just tender. Using slotted spoon, transfer potatoes to a separate bowl and drizzle with marinade while hot. (Potatoes do not need an ice bath.)

Next, add your carrots to the boiling water and when just tender transfer to the ice bath. Once cool, remove from ice bath to a separate container.

Add green beans to the boiling water and cook until just tender, then transfer to ice bath, cool, and remove from water.

To assemble the veggie tray, divide your serving platter into three rows and fill each with a single kind of vegetable and drizzle marinade over everything.

Jimtown Yummies

Years ago, we were traveling in California wine country and our host suggested we eat at the Jimtown store. It was there I met "my" sandwich: fig and olive paste, ripe pear, goat cheese and prosciutto with a drizzle of balsamic reduction on great bread. I savored every morsel and once home started replicating it in an appetizer I call Jimtown Yummies.

Fig and Olive tapenade (adapted from epicurious.com)

- 1 cup quartered dried black mission figs
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 2 cups pitted brine-cured Kalamata olives, coarsely chopped
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon whole grain mustard
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon drained nonpareil capers
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground pepper
- Kosher salt

In a heavy medium saucepan, combine the figs and water. Set over medium heat and bring to a simmer. Partially cover and cook, stirring once or twice until the figs are very tender, about 30 minutes. Cool slightly, then drain, reserving 1 tablespoon of the liquid. In a food processor combine figs, olives, lemon juice, mustard, garlic, capers, rosemary and reserved fig liquid. Pulse to create a thick paste. With the motor running, gradually add the oil. Transfer to a storage container. Season generously with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate at least 24 hours to develop flavors. Before serving, bring the tapenade to room temperature. Keeps in refrigerator for several weeks.

For appetizer:

- 1 baguette, sliced thinly at an angle
- Fig and olive tapenade
- 1 loaf goat cheese
- 1 or 2 ripe pears, cored and thinly sliced
- Balsamic glaze/reduction (Nonna Pia's is readily available in the salad dressing section).