

The Humble Cabbage is Actually a Cancer-Fighting Hero

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Rebecca Moore, Extension Agent, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

The cabbage family is bigger and more diverse than you might have realized. Foods found in this family include: bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collards, kale, kohlrabi, mustard greens, radishes, rutabaga, turnip, turnip greens, watercress, and of course cabbage. These vegetables are called “cruciferous” because their four-petal flower looks like a cross or crucifer. This is one group of vegetables you really need to get to know, because of its potential cancer-fighting connection.

The American Institute for Cancer Research and the American Dietetic Association have reported on several studies that indicate cruciferous vegetables may help protect against cancer. These vegetables are full of nutrients including phytochemicals that seem to have unique cancer-fighting properties. Some examples of phytochemicals include lutein, beta carotene, indoles, sulforaphane, fiber, Vitamin C and others. An extra bonus is these vegetables also supply varying amounts of calcium, iron, and folic acid.

Cabbage is one of the oldest vegetables cultivated by man and grows well in most climates around the world. It is an important winter food that grows well in the cold because of its tightly packed heads with overlapping leaves. This time of year you can find all the cabbage you could possibly want right here in south Georgia and north Florida . . . and at a very good price! Cabbage is usually available all year long, but you can find fresh cabbage being harvested right now, locally.

Choose heads of cabbage which are firm and heavy without any blemishes. Fresh cabbage can be refrigerated unwashed in a plastic bag for up to a week. Cabbage can be eaten raw, steamed, boiled, sautéed, stir-fried, or microwaved. It doesn't take long to cook, so be careful not to over cook.

The most popular way to prepare cabbage is steamed or boiled. Cut one cabbage head into wedges or bite size pieces. Steam or boil in about 1/2 cup of chicken broth until just tender (5 to 8 minutes).

Cabbage doesn't freeze well if you are planning to use it for salads. But, you can freeze cabbage if you plan to use it as a cooked vegetable. First select freshly picked solid heads. Trim coarse outer leaves from head. Cut into medium to coarse shreds or thin wedges, or separate head into leaves. Water blanch 1 1/2 minutes. Cool promptly, drain and package in moisture vapor proof containers, leaving 1/2 - inch headspace. Seal and freeze.

Any type of vegetable you choose from the cabbage family not only is delicious but full of nutrients and cancer fighting phytochemicals. Researchers often recommend the very colorful purple or red cabbage. They have found it to contain twice as much vitamin C as green cabbage, plus it is full of anthocyanins, a beneficial phytochemical. Try the following recipe for red cabbage from American Institute for Cancer Research.

Braised Red Cabbage with Apples

- 1 tsp. unsalted butter, or canola oil
- 1/2 medium head (about 6 cups) red cabbage, cored, quartered, and cut in 1/2 inch strips
- 1/2 large red onion (about 2 cups) thinly sliced
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary, or 1/2 tsp. dried
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 cup cranberry-raspberry juice blend

In a large, nonstick skillet, heat the butter or oil over medium high heat. Stir in cabbage and onion until coated with oil. Cook, stirring often, until cabbage is wilted and onion is limp, about 15 minutes.

Stir in apple, cumin, rosemary, allspice and salt. Add juice. Cover tightly and simmer over medium heat until cabbage is soft, 35-40 minutes, reducing heat, if necessary.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 91 calories, 1 g total fat (<1 g saturated fat), 20 g carbohydrates, 2 g protein, 3 g dietary fiber, 322 mg sodium