

IFAS Extension

There's Much To Love In Broccoli
Tallahassee Democrat

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Why would you want to “crucify” your diet? Because cruciferous vegetables are rich in isothiocyanates, indoles, lutein and sulforaphan; powerful disease fighting phytochemicals known to protect against certain cancers and even eye diseases.

Flowers on plants belonging to the cruciferous family, cluster in groups of four, a pattern suggestive of a crucifix. Cruciferous vegetables include broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale, collards, rutabaga, kohlrabi, bok choy and turnips. There are also some more pungent relatives including, mustard and mustard greens, horseradish, radish, watercress, and arugula.

Broccoli is a favorite of the cruciferous vegetables because it is so versatile. It can be eaten raw or cooked, and served as an appetizer, side dish or added to a main dish. Fresh broccoli is available year round with the greatest supplies available in December, January and March.

When selecting fresh broccoli, remember to choose stalks that are in good condition. They should have tightly closed flower buds that are a rich, deep green or green with a purplish cast. A firm, compact cluster (smaller flower buds) is a sign of quality. The buds turn light green or yellow when they are in the process of blooming which indicates over-maturity. Stay away from over mature broccoli, the younger, tight bud stalks will have more nutritive value. There is much research being done with broccoli sprouts which are shown to contain 10-100 times the amount of phytochemicals as the fully developed broccoli.

Fresh broccoli should be stored at home in a tightly covered container or moisture-vapor proof bag in the refrigerator. It is best when used as soon as possible, but should stay fresh for several days.

To prepare fresh broccoli for cooking, wash the broccoli and trim the main stem slightly. If the stems are over 1/2 inch in diameter, make a lengthwise gash in each to allow the stems and flower buds to cook more evenly. Be careful not to overcook as it doesn't take long to cook broccoli. It can be steamed, boiled in a small amount of water, microwaved and stir-fried. No matter what method of cooking is used, it is important to leave the lid off for the first five minutes so that the broccoli will retain its bright green color. Overcooked broccoli will turn a bronze-green color.

Be sure to eat plenty of cruciferous vegetables like broccoli to benefit from phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are the plant's natural defense system against disease, sunlight, insects, oxidation from air and pollutants. Fortunately, they act the same way as they do in the plant once we ingest them. We benefit from their ability to boost our immune systems and increase our resistance to certain diseases. But don't get any ideas about trying to skip out on vegetables and take a supplement instead. Phytochemicals appear to lose disease-fighting properties when isolated from natural sources and put in a pill form. You'll benefit a lot more if you'll just “crucify” your diet!

If you have a question, write to Rebecca Moore, County Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service--Thomas County, P.O. Box 49, Thomasville, GA 31799, or call the Extension Office (229) 225-4130, between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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