

Color Your Plate with Nutrition-Rich Greens, Purples, Yellows and Blues

Tallahassee Democrat

Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent IV, Leon County Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

Growing up you may have been told to eat your greens, but what about your purples, reds, oranges, yellows and blues? Give your body the balanced nutrition it needs by eating a variety of colorful foods every day. During the 2011 National Nutrition Month®, celebrated in March, the American Dietetic Association (ADA) encourages us to add color and nutrients to our meals through this year's theme: "Eat Right with Color®." Nutrition experts agree that vibrant, brightly-colored foods are often the healthiest bargains in the grocery store. They tend to be nutrient-rich meaning that more nutrition is packed into every calorie.

Crystelle Fogle, MBA, MS, RD, with Montana's Cardiovascular Health Program comments that "the natural color of food is often a good indicator as to its' nutritional value. In general, deep colors mean that foods have the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that our bodies need for optimal health at any age."

Here from the ADA are a few of the tasty colors that can put delicious nutrition on your plate and help you maintain a healthier weight, as well as lower risks of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

**Green** produce not only looks and tastes great, but it's rich in phyto-chemicals, essential vitamins, like folate, minerals, and fiber. Eating leafy greens may protect eyes by keeping the retinas strong. Other green produce may reduce cancer risks. Eat some of these green foods daily:

*Fruits:* avocado, apples, grapes, honeydew, kiwi and lime

*Vegetables:* artichoke, asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, green beans, green peppers, kale, spinach, turnips and other leafy greens

**Orange and deep yellow** fruits and vegetables contain nutrients (beta-carotene, Vitamin C) that promote healthy vision and immune systems as well as reduce the risk of some cancers. Consider including these colorful foods in meals and snacks:

*Fruits:* apricot, cantaloupe, oranges, grapefruit, mango, papaya, peaches, pineapple, tangerines

*Vegetables:* carrots, yellow pepper, yellow corn, sweet potatoes, winter squash

**Purple and blue** foods not only add beautiful shades of color to our plates, they may have antioxidant and anti-aging benefits and may help with memory, urinary tract health and reduced cancer risks. Tasty options include:

*Fruits:* blackberries, blueberries, grapes, plums, raisins

*Vegetables:* beets, eggplant, purple cabbage, purple-fleshed potato, radicchio

**Red fruits and vegetables contain a health promoting antioxidant, lycopene. This group of produce** may help maintain a healthy heart, vision, immunity and may reduce cancer risks. Help yourself to:

*Fruits:* cherries, cranberries, guava, pomegranate, red/pink grapefruit, red grapes, watermelon

*Vegetables:* beets, red onions, red peppers, red potatoes (skin-on), rhubarb, tomatoes

**Compounds contained in white, tan and brown** produce often help the body to lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Other key phyto-chemicals may reduce cancer risks.

*Fruits:* banana, brown pear, dates, white peaches

*Vegetables:* cauliflower, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, turnips, white-fleshed potato and white corn

Let's not forget to include other colorful foods from all food groups in our daily meal plans; for example, lean red meats are important sources of protein, iron and zinc that our children need to grow and maintain muscle mass. Other white foods include fat-free/low-fat dairy foods which are excellent sources of Vitamin D, calcium, and potassium. And, whole grains must be included in the brown and tan category. These products provide the necessary fiber, B vitamins and energy we need to have get up and go!

So, fill your shopping cart with all the colors of good health like green broccoli, purple grapes, yellow peppers, orange cantaloupe, black beans, brown rice, pink salmon, lean red meat and fat-free/low-fat milk. You and your family will eat and feel better. Don't forget to count the colors on your plate and "Eat Right with Color®".

Sources and for more information see:

American Dietetic Association, <http://www.eatright.org/nnm/>,

Eat Right Montana, <http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm>

If you have a question, write to Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 606-5203, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

The University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County is an equal Employment Opportunity--Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, gender or national origin.