

## **Plant/Eat a Rainbow of Vegetables and Fruits**

*By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist*

Spring is a great time to eat a rainbow, or plan to, as the coming garden is mapped out. Vegetables and fruits, in a rainbow of colors, give the nutrients needed for good health.

Red strawberries will all too soon be blooming and growing. Before we know it the raspberries, tomatoes, and watermelons will come. All of these provide Vitamin C. Tomatoes have the added boost of lycopene, which may reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Vitamin C helps heal cuts, fight infection, and keep teeth and gums healthy. It also helps our bodies absorb iron better, especially the iron found in other plant sources, like spinach and beans. A half cup of strawberries contains 70% and a quarter of a cantaloupe contains 93% of the Vitamin C many Americans need in a day. Also rich in Vitamin C are spinach, potatoes, peppers, cabbage, cauliflower, and kohlrabi.

Orange, yellow and dark green vegetables and fruits are likely to be rich in Vitamin A. Vitamin A is significant in eye health, especially helping eyes to adjust to the dark. Vitamin A also helps keep hair and skin looking healthy and helps protect against infection. Everyone knows that carrots are a good source of Vitamin A, but did you realize that a small handful of baby carrots or a half cup of carrot sticks has 383% of the amount of Vitamin A that most Americans need in a day! When making your planting (or grocery list) decisions, notice that sweet potatoes, pumpkins, yellow squashes, spinach, broccoli, and other dark green vegetables like collard greens and kale, are all high in Vitamin A. These dark green options also offer Vitamin K, potassium, lutein and zeaxanthin. Potassium helps maintain a healthy blood pressure and aids in muscle contraction. Lutein and zeaxanthin contribute to healthy eyesight as well. Add some or all of these tasty and nutritious options to your rainbow garden or on your plate today.

Blue blueberries provide their own set of nutrients, including Vitamins A, C and K, potassium, and a wealth of antioxidants that help prevent certain cancers and eye diseases, varicose veins, and may help with diabetes, high cholesterol and Alzheimer's disease.

Purple grapes are one purple option, but these days it is not the only one. There are purple varieties of tomatoes, carrots and cabbage, to name just a few.

University of Missouri publication, *Vegetable Planting Calendar*, G 6201, lists the amounts of Vitamins A and C in certain common vegetables. This guide sheet also explains when and how densely to plant vegetables. Ask for it at your local University of Missouri Extension Center, or download it from the web at

<http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/hort/g06201.htm>.

For more information on eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or [HackertJ@missouri.edu](mailto:HackertJ@missouri.edu) or your local [University of Missouri Extension office](#). University of Missouri Extension - your one-stop source for practical education on almost anything. University of Missouri Extension - your one-stop source for practical education on almost anything.

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