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Plants on Your Plate

Broccoli

One of my favorite fresh vegetables to reach for in the midst of winter is broccoli. Though not a locally grown product - right now at least - broccoli is grown year-round in California. Broccoli is native to the Mediterranean region, where it has been cultivated since Roman times. The first commercial broccoli crop grown in the U.S. was started in California in the 1920's, but broccoli did not become a significant crop until after World War II. Today, California grows more than 90% of the broccoli in the United States and is the third largest producer in the world.

Broccoli is a member of the Brassicaceae plant family, also known as cruciferous. Other familiar plants in the family include Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, and kohlrabi. The word broccoli comes from the Italian plural of *broccolo*, which means "the flowering crest of a cabbage".

Broccoli is an excellent source of a multitude of vitamins and minerals, including vitamins A, C and K, manganese, potassium, and phosphorus. These nutrients are essential for eye, skin and bone health, heart health and cancer prevention. It is also a good source of folic acid, a nutrient important for pregnant women and the developing fetus. Broccoli is also rich in an assortment of phytonutrients, particularly glucosinolates and sulforaphane, which are being researched for their role in cancer treatment and prevention. All that nutrition is wrapped in a

low-calorie package, as one cup of raw broccoli contains about 50 calories, and also provides 2.5 grams of fiber and 2.5 grams of protein.

Unfortunately, a downside of cruciferous vegetables is that the sulphur-containing compounds can be bitter, especially when overcooked. Proper cooking can be the difference maker for the palatability of many vegetables, so consider your preparation methods carefully. For a quick and tasty preparation, try roasted broccoli. Simply toss florets with a tablespoon or two of olive oil and oven roast on a foil lined baking sheet at 400 degrees for 15 minutes. Top with a sprinkle with parmesan or squeeze of fresh lemon juice after cooking. If you have a little more time and are feeling inspired, the salad below is a beautiful combination of colors, flavors and textures.

Broccoli and Red Pepper Salad

(makes six servings)

½ cup pecan halves
1 large head broccoli (about 5 cups)
1 large red bell pepper
½ large sweet onion

Dressing:

2 tablespoons vinegar (white wine or cider)
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 teaspoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon honey
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon ground ginger

- 1- Toast pecans in heavy skillet over medium heat until lightly browned. *Watch carefully*, as they can burn quickly. Roughly chop the pecans if desired, set aside.
- 2-Prepare vegetables. Wash broccoli and separate into florets and trim stems into small matchstick-like strips. *Blanch* * broccoli by cooking in boiling water for one minute, drain and put into ice water for one minute, drain well. Wash bell pepper and cut into thin strips. Cut onion into thin strips.
- 3- Combine vegetables in large bowl and stir to combine.
- 4- Combine dressing ingredients in small jar and shake to combine. Pour over vegetables and chill for 30 minutes. When ready to serve, top with pecans.

**Blanching* is a quick cook-quick cool process that tenderizes the broccoli and brightens the color. The process is also used as a preparation to freeze fresh vegetables.

Nutrition information: Calories: 93, Total Fat: 5g, Saturated Fat: .6g, Sodium: 76mg, Carbohydrates: 11g, Fiber: 3g, Protein: 3g

Recipe adapted from Seasonal and Simple, analyzed by verywellfit.com

**Denise Sullivan is a Nutrition and Health Education Specialist for MU Extension in the Urban West Region, covering Jackson and Platte Counties. For research-based nutrition and food safety information and programs, visit <https://extension.missouri.edu/counties/urban-west-region>



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