

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Spark interest in fruit, veggies on the Fourth

I want to rev up the healthfulness of our Fourth of July cookout. I always make a veggie platter or fruit salad, but they get bypassed for burgers, hot dogs, potato salad and chips. What can I do to draw more attention to healthier fare?

Why not take your cue from Old Glory and focus on red, white and blue fruits and vegetables this weekend?

Too often, people at parties and holiday gatherings treat fruits and vegetables as the Debbie Downer of dining. But with a little thought and effort, you can make produce the star of the show:

- Put strawberries, sliced bananas and dark grapes (not quite blue, but close) on skewers.
- On a rectangular platter, arrange raspberries and cut apples in red and white stripes, and put a bowl of blueberries in the corner.
- Layer red, white and blue fruits in a clear glass straight-sided bowl and let it show its colors.
- Keep it simple and just line up three bowls of red, white and blue fruits or vegetables on the buffet line. You can use watermelon, berries, cherries or red peppers; cauliflower, cole slaw, bananas, apples or white grapes; and blueberries or purple grapes.

Focusing on the colors of fruits and vegetables isn't just a gimmick. The color of produce often indicates what sort of phytochemicals it provides. Phytochemicals are plant chemicals that aren't essential nutrients but still appear to provide health benefits.

There are many different types of phytochemicals. Some are antioxidants that help limit damage to cells resulting from oxidation, which is a normal



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process in the body. Some are carotenoids, which offer many benefits including lowering the risk of age-related sight problems. Some phytochemicals appear to have anti-bacterial or anti-inflammatory properties. And some have been linked with improved blood flow, anti-cancer properties and even other benefits.

Research is still nailing down precisely the effects of phytochemicals in the body. In the meantime, you not only want to get a good variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet, but you want to make sure you regularly consume produce of all different colors — dark green, yellow, purple, orange and, of course, red, white and blue — to make sure you're getting a broad range of these nutrients.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation offers a wealth of information about phytochemicals on its website. Arranged by color group, you can find out what fruits and vegetables contain which phytochemicals and what health benefits they offer. It has information on flavonoids, from anthocyanidins to flavonols; carotenoids, from beta-carotene to zeaxanthin; and other phytochemicals, from indoles to resveratrol. If this sparks your interest, learn more at pbhfoundation.org/about/res/pic/phytolist/.

For more information and fruit and veggie recipe ideas, see Ohio State University Extension's "Maximize Your Nutrients" web page at localfoods.osu.edu/maximizenutrients.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Dan Remley, Ohio State University Extension's field specialist in Food, Nutrition and Wellness.

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