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superfoods

By Mike Dwyer

Chances are, you've made one—or maybe several—New Year's resolutions to improve your lifestyle in 2007. Chances are also that your resolutions are focused on your health and eating habits. Getting in shape, losing weight, becoming more active, enjoying life to the fullest — these are all goals that rely on fueling your body the most effective and efficient way possible.

more antioxidants than most other fruits



good fat that actually lowers cholesterol



Depending on your individual health-focused goals, there are really only three things you need for success: 1) a positive attitude; 2) a reasonable amount of exercise; and 3) as Dr. Steven Pratt, author of *SuperFoods RX*, says, “One really good diet” overall. And, as Dr. Pratt’s book suggests, that “one really good diet” should incorporate plenty of “Superfoods”.

What are these mysterious “Superfoods”? The truth is, there is nothing mysterious about these remarkable all-natural wonders of nature. Superfoods (also sometimes referred to as “functional” foods) are common produce items that, ounce for ounce, offer more vitamins, nutrients, and disease fighting substances than any other foods. Superfoods provide many of the powerful, health-sustaining elements, beyond basic nutrition, that will lead to better overall health, without an abundance of calories and without creating flavorless meals.

Superfoods are all common produce items that can be found in abundance at the Fruit Center Marketplace. Whether you're a customer at the Milton or Hingham location of the Fruit Center, you'll be guaranteed to find a tremendous selection of the best quality Superfoods.

To aid you in your health-related goals, the Fruit Center has compiled a list of the “Top Ten” Superfoods that you should be adding to your everyday diet:

apples

Bet you didn't think the saying “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” has a halo of truth. This New England favorite has been the subject of several recent studies suggesting that apples provide a “whole body” benefit because of their disease fighting profile. Apples are known to lower cholesterol and to reduce the risk of stroke, prostate cancer, and Type II diabetes. Don't peel your apple though — two-thirds of the apple's fiber and lots of antioxidants are found in the peel. In fact, apples contain both soluble and insoluble fiber. It's this double dose of fiber that lowers cholesterol levels, reducing your risk of hardening of the arteries, heart attack, and stroke.



avocados

You've probably heard that avocados have a high fat content. This is certainly true, but researchers have found that avocados contain the "good fat" that actually lowers cholesterol. Avocados contain oleic acid, a monounsaturated fat, and beta-sitosterol -- two substances that doctors believe lower cholesterol levels. Avocados are also a good source of potassium which regulates blood pressure and guards against circulatory diseases, heart disease, and stroke. A bit of mashed avocado is a terrific substitute for butter or cream cheese on a bagel.

blueberries

Blueberries are proof that good things really do come in small packages. They provide an abundance of health-promoting substances, including more antioxidants than most other fruits and vegetables. Studies conducted by the USDA Human Nutrition Center have shown blueberries to improve learning and memory functions as well as decrease the effects of aging. It has also been reported that blueberries promote urinary tract health, memory function, healthy aging, improved vision, strengthened blood vessels, and weight control.

broccoli

Here's one of the kings of the cruciferous family, a group of vegetables that are all highly nutritious. Broccoli offers more vitamin C than an orange, more fiber than wheat bran bread, and as much calcium as a glass of milk. Broccoli also contains many cancer-fighting substances called isothiocyanates and benefits your immune system. Broccoli also contains phytonutrients which have anti-cancer effects. Specifically, scientists have found that one of broccoli's phytonutrients, sulforaphane, boosts the body's detoxification enzymes, which then helps to clear potentially carcinogenic substances more quickly. Other benefits include stronger bones and a boost to the immune system.

garlic

Long thought to have medicinal properties, garlic is believed to reduce arterial plaque buildup, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, prevent blood clots, and fight against certain cancers. Garlic contains vitamin C, vitamin B6, selenium, manganese, and diallyl sulfide which lowers LDL cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol) and maintains a healthy immune system. Garlic also inhibits plaque formation in the arteries and is believed to prevent weight gain.

kiwi

Sure, it's probably the cutest Superfood on our list, but it's also one of the most potent. Kiwis are an excellent source of vitamin C, providing a large amount of your recommended daily intake. Vitamin C works as an antioxidant and reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers. Kiwis also offer vitamin E, folate, magnesium, and potassium. Kiwis are especially rich in lutein, one of two major carotenoids found in the human eye. In fact, a recent study ranked kiwi higher than spinach and all other fruits and vegetables (except yellow corn) for its lutein content.

spinach

This one is probably not shocking, but were you aware of all of its benefits? Amazingly, researchers have identified at least 13 different flavonoid compounds in spinach that function as antioxidants and as anti-cancer agents. For those looking for vitamin K, spinach is loaded with vitamin K (one cup has 200% of your recommended daily intake) which is key to providing good bone health. Spinach is also a good source of calcium, magnesium, folate, vitamin A, and vitamin C.

sunflower seeds

Perhaps one of the more surprising entries on the list, but no less mighty in its effects. (just a quarter-cup of sunflower seeds contains 90.5% of the daily value for vitamin E) which neutralizes free radicals. Sunflower seeds are also believed to reduce cholesterol, enhance the body's immune response, and decrease the risk of certain cancers. Regarding the seed's magnesium content, numerous studies have demonstrated that magnesium can contribute to reducing the severity of asthma, lower high blood pressure, and prevent migraine headaches as well as reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. Try adding sunflower seeds to tuna, chicken or turkey salad, scrambled eggs, or to your favorite hot or cold cereal.

sweet potatoes

Typically, potatoes are not top-of-mind when you think of healthy eating, but sweet potatoes are a whole different story. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) ranked the sweet potato number one of all vegetables in nutrition because of its dietary fiber content, complex carbohydrates, protein, vitamins A and C, iron, and calcium. How's that for an endorsement? Sweet potatoes are a tremendous source of vitamin A, which preserves and improves eyesight and helps to fight viral infections. They are also a good source of manganese, vitamin B6, potassium, and iron and have the distinction of being classified as an "anti-diabetic" food.

walnuts

With an amazing concentration of omega-3 fatty acids, raw walnuts provide cardiovascular protection, better cognitive function, and anti-inflammatory benefits. The omega-3's also benefit your brain. Since your brain is about 60% structural fat, omega-3 fat is exactly what it needs. Speaking of beneficial fats, walnuts are also an important source of monounsaturated fats. These fats have a positive effect on cholesterol levels and other heart-related factors. Additionally, walnuts contain ellagic acid, which supports the immune system and melatonin, an antioxidant that induces and regulates sleep.





braised kidney beans & sweet potato

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. fresh ginger, chopped
- 1 medium carrot, sliced thin
- 1 medium green pepper, cut in one inch squares
- 2 cups sweet potatoes, cut in one inch cubes
- 2 cups crimini mushrooms, sliced medium thick
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. red chili powder
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 cups plus one Tbsp. vegetable broth
- 15 oz. can kidney beans, drained
- salt & pepper to taste

Prepare first six ingredients by chopping and slicing. Heat 1 Tbsp. broth in a medium to large soup or braising pot. Sauté onion in broth over medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until translucent. Add garlic, ginger, carrot, pepper, sweet potatoes and mushrooms. Continue to sauté for another five minutes, stirring frequently. Add spices and mix thoroughly. Mix tomato paste and broth together and add. Cover and simmer on low or about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add beans, salt, pepper and continue to cook for another 5 minutes on medium heat uncovered or until vegetables are tender.

warm spinach salad

- 1 granny smith apple, sliced
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries, chopped
- 1 package fresh baby spinach
- 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- 2 Tbsp. cranberry juice
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 2 Tbsp. reduced-fat sour cream
- 2 slices cooked bacon, crumbled

Combine first four ingredients in a large bowl and toss well. Combine vinegar, sugar, cranberry juice, mustard, salt and pepper in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat; cook for one minute. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream. Drizzle warm dressing over spinach mixture and toss well. Sprinkle with bacon and serve immediately.



With your Superfood "Top Ten" list now committed to memory, or simply torn from these pages, be sure to visit the Fruit Center Marketplace to pick up the finest varieties of these miracles of nature and make this year your best ever. [SSM](#)

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