



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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July 8-9, 2016

Foods to Fight Cancer: Essential Foods to Help Prevent Cancer

A review by Laurel Blomquist

Foods to Fight Cancer by Richard Beliveau, Ph.D. and Denis Gingras, Ph.D. is not just for cancer patients. Certainly, it provides a path by which people who have been diagnosed can become partners in the fight for their health. However, it is meant as a prevention guide for anyone living in today's society looking for a way to take control of their own wellness.

The book begins by explaining exactly what cancer is. For most people, cancer is a scary word. When we hear it, we think of acute health problems, perhaps even a death sentence. This book describes cancer as a chronic disease, one that develops over time from a variety of factors. Humans today are bombarded by thousands of environmental toxins, more than at any other era in our existence. That, coupled with a diet of convenience and a sedentary lifestyle, has led some of us to switch on genetic markers that turn cancer or other chronic diseases, on.

The fact is that we all have cancer cells in our bodies right now. Cancer is really nothing more than cells reacting to this toxic environment that they have been presented with. All life on Earth has been created through evolution of cells and organisms, reacting and changing to better adapt to their environment. Cancer is nothing but an extension of this evolution. The only difference is that cancer cells have gone rogue. In other words, instead of adapting as a part of the organism (you), cancer cells (if given the chance) adapt and separate themselves from you, growing as a foreign body inside your own.

The authors argue that by changing what we eat and utilizing what they call 'nutraceuticals,' we can turn those genetic markers to the 'off' position. In this situation, cancer cells, instead of proliferating, will be found by your intelligent immune system and be destroyed. So what, exactly, is a nutraceutical? As you can imagine, a nutraceutical is a pharmaceutical that is found in food. We all know that foods contain carbohydrates, proteins and fats (aka **macronutrients**). What these scientists are looking at are the **micronutrients** (phytochemical compounds, fibers, vitamins and minerals).

Farmers have some control when it comes to making vitamins and minerals available to plants. Here at Harmony Valley Farm, we prioritize soil health by adding compost, growing cover crops and rotating crops to replenish soil nutrients.

This Week's Box

FRESH PORCELAIN GARLIC: This garlic is less than one week old, so consider it fresh! Leave it on your counter in a well-ventilated area to dry or just use it while it's fresh.

PURPLE CIPOLLINI ONIONS: This is a beautiful, mild onion that is delicious sliced thinly in salads or on sandwiches.

SNOW PEAS: We're nearing the end of peas for the year. Enjoy in a stir-fry this week, and don't forget, the pods are edible!

GREEN TOP CARROTS: Don't forget the tops are edible too! Turn them into carrot top pesto (recipes on our website), incorporate them into soup or juice them!

SWEETHEART CABBAGE: This is a unique salad cabbage, intended to be used in salads, slaws and other raw preparations. Enjoy a classic creamy cole slaw!

AMARANTH GREENS: See this week's vegetable feature for more information.

GREEN & YELLOW BEANS: Lightly sauté in butter with fresh garlic and garnish with chopped fresh herbs.

BROCCOLI OR GREEN TOP RED RADISHES: Toss either with oil, salt and pepper and roast them.

CUCUMBERS: Make a creamy cucumber salad with thinly sliced onions and fresh herbs!

ZUCCHINI: Slice thinly, brush with oil and grill it!

When it comes to phytochemical compounds, however, the plants have their own ways and means of producing them. From page 59:

"Phytochemical compounds are molecules that allow plants to defend themselves against infection and damage caused by microorganisms, insects, or other predators. Plants cannot flee their attackers and have consequently had to develop advanced defense systems to counter the harmful effects of aggressors present in their environment. The phytochemicals produced by plants have antibacterial, antifungal, and insecticidal properties; they repair the damage caused by aggressors and allow the plant to survive in hostile conditions.... *Because phytochemical production occurs in direct proportion to the stress to which the plant is exposed, we might guess that plants cultivated naturally, without the use of synthetic pesticides, are more susceptible to attack and thus contain greater quantities of self-defense molecules,*" (emphasis mine).

Without directly saying it, what these scientists mean is that organic foods most likely contain phytochemicals in greater amounts. While the jury is still out on whether or not organic foods contain more macronutrients than their conventional counterparts, these scientists are theorizing that organic does trump conventional when it comes to micronutrients, particularly phytochemicals.

A basic premise of the book is that human beings have been tasting and testing plants on Earth for thousands of years. We often think that our ancestors

chose the plants that we eat simply because they did not poison us, or because they tasted good, or perhaps because they were easy to grow. The authors argue that humans have actually selected plants based on their ability to fight disease and keep us healthy. They cite ancient texts such as the Bible, Greek, Roman and Arabic mythology, Egyptian scrolls, Chinese culinary preparations, Japanese tea masters, Ayurvedic principles, Assyrian cuneiform, Aztec archeological remains, and Mayan and Toltec legends to prove that humans have been classifying these plants as beneficials for a very long time.

The doctors set out to prove that these compounds in food really work. In their lab, they use raw extracts of whole fruits and vegetables. They do not separate these extracts into their parts. They are interested in what the fruit or vegetable as a whole has to offer. What they found is nothing short of spectacular! The phytochemicals that they study include: antioxidants, polyphenols and isothiocyanates; compounds that target the processes involved in the development of a tumor. They think a diet based on regular intake of these foods is one of the strongest weapons we have for the prevention of cancer.

So, what plants have emerged as the focus of their study? In brief, the categories that are presented in the book include: the brassica family, (cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, arugula and the like) the allium family, (garlic, onions, leeks, shallots, etc.) soy (edamame, miso, tempeh), turmeric, green tea, berries,

omega-3s, tomatoes, citrus fruits, red wine and chocolate. The scope of this article is too short to go into the details of how the phytochemicals in each of these categories work, as well as the best ways to prepare and consume these foods for maximum benefit. Keep your eyes peeled for future articles in this series for that information!

I strongly encourage anyone who is serious about taking charge of their health to read this book and learn more about how whole, organic foods can alter the course of your life. My motivation to eat delicious, fresh, nutritious food has never been higher. Luckily, I work at the best possible place for access to these wonders of nature: Harmony Valley Farm!

Vegetable Feature: Amaranth Greens

by Andrea Yoder

Amaranth greens could be called one of our own “super-foods.” While I’ve never sent a sample to the lab to test nutrient levels, we know greens in general are packed with nutrients and foods with vibrant colors are such because of the antioxidants and phytochemicals in them. So I introduce to you the beautiful, deep red amaranth, the cooking green in your box this week!

The variety of amaranth we grow is referred to as “Polish Amaranth.” We purchased the seed from Wild Garden Seeds (WGS), which is kind of funny because Richard is the one who actually gave them the seed originally! The story goes like this.....one day Richard was driving to LaCrosse and saw this beautiful red amaranth growing in a garden along the way. He stopped and asked the people who lived there about this plant. They said their Aunt May brought the seed with her from Poland and they were happy to share it with Richard. So Richard collected some seed and started growing it, mostly as a baby green to mix into his gourmet salad mix. It didn’t do so well as a salad mix ingredient, but in later years we found success growing it as a mid-summer bunching green used for cooking. Since we aren’t in the business of seed production, Richard passed the seed onto Frank Morton at WGS and he has been maintaining this variety of amaranth. Thanks Frank!

While many greens, such as lettuce and spinach, struggle to thrive during the heat of the summer, amaranth grows in all its glory. As a more mature bunching green we recommend enjoying it as a cooking green for optimal flavor. The stems are often tender enough to be eaten as well, just finely chop them and cook them alongside the greens. Amaranth can be simply boiled, steamed or sautéed with garlic and onions for a super-simple preparation. It also pairs well with other summer vegetables such as zucchini, green beans, corn, tomatoes, basil, etc. Amaranth is similar in flavor to spinach, except better!

Amaranth is thought to have originated in Central and/or South America, but has made its way around the globe. It can be found in Europe, Asia and the Americas, which means there are many options for finding ways to use this vegetable. It pairs well with beans, cumin, coriander and oregano for more of a Mexican approach. Stir-fry it with garlic, onion, ginger and a drizzle of sesame oil for more of a Chinese influence. Mix it with pasta, tomatoes, oregano, basil and Parmesan for an Italian flair, or take it in more in the direction of Indian cuisine by choosing curry spices & lentils (see this week’s recipe). We hope you enjoy this lovely green, for its aesthetics, nutrition, history and flavor

Red Lentil Soup with Amaranth Greens

Yield: 4 servings

2 Tbsp ghee or sunflower oil
¾ cup finely diced onion
1 Tbsp minced garlic
2 tsp red curry paste
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 Tbsp mustard seeds
1 ½ cups red lentils
6-7 cups water
½ bunch cilantro, leaves and stems separated
Sea salt, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 bunch amaranth greens
Lemon wedges, for serving (optional)
Yogurt, for serving (optional)



1. Heat ghee or sunflower oil in a soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic and sauté just until the onions are softened, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the curry paste, turmeric and mustard seeds. Continue to sauté, stirring frequently, for several more minutes until the mustard seeds are fragrant. Add the lentils, 6 cups of water, and 1 ½ tsp salt. Bring to a simmer.
3. Separate the leaves of cilantro from the stems. Mince the stems finely and add them to the soup. Coarsely chop the leaves and set aside to use as a garnish when serving the soup.
4. Continue to simmer the soup, uncovered, stirring frequently. Simmer until the lentils have disintegrated into a soft texture and are thick. You may puree the soup at this point if you want it perfectly smooth, or may leave it as is. Adjust the thickness of the soup to your liking by adding an additional cup of water if needed.
5. Prepare the amaranth greens by separating the leaves from the stems. Roughly chop the greens into bite sized pieces. You should have about 4-5 cups of greens. Finely mince the remaining stems. You may choose to discard the lower portion of the stems that are thicker.
6. Add the amaranth to the soup and stir to combine. Continue to simmer for another 5-8 minutes or until the greens are wilted and tender. Season the soup with freshly ground black pepper and additional salt if needed.
7. Portion the soup into bowls and serve along with optional (but highly recommended) garnishes including chopped cilantro, yogurt and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Recipe adapted from a similar recipe featured in Deborah Madison’s book, *Vegetable Literacy*