

# **10 Tips for Better Tasting Fresh Produce**



10 TIPS FOR  
BETTER  
TASTING  
FRESH  
PRODUCE

LIVE WELL UTAH

*How do you like your vegetables? If you're looking for some delicious ways to get your family to eat more fruits and veggies, look no further! We've got ten tips to help you pump up the flavor of your fresh produce.*

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We all know that fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. We've learned ways to make them less expensive and more convenient, but what if you or your family members just don't like the taste? This week we offer 10 tips to help everyone learn to love the taste of fruits and vegetables.

1. Try fresh fruits or vegetables with a healthy dip or dressing. Try hummus, salad dressing or yogurt.
2. Increase the amount of vegetables in flavorful, well-liked foods. Try extra tomatoes and beans in chili, carrots in tomato sauce, broccoli mixed into mac and cheese and peas in minestrone soup.
3. Add shredded carrots or zucchini to meatloaf, casseroles and quick breads.
4. Try eating your vegetables first, when you are most hungry. Things really do taste better when you are hungry! Put out fresh vegetables with dip before dinner, or start the meal with a salad or vegetable soup.
5. Shop in season—fruits and vegetables that are in season taste better. Think of a wonderful tomato from the garden in summer vs. the ones you can buy from the store in January. Farmers markets, roadside stands and your local grocery store are great places to get seasonal produce.
6. Try preparing vegetables in different ways: raw, steamed, roasted, etc. The flavor and texture can be very different, depending on how you cook them. If you don't like them one way, you might like them another!
7. I especially recommend roasting or grilling vegetables. You get wonderfully sweet vegetables that are soft and

creamy on the inside and crisp on the outside.

8. Make eating vegetables fun by playing with your food. Try ants on a log, rainbow salad or pizza faces.
9. Use a small amount of sugar when cooking bitter vegetables like kale or Brussels sprouts. This will help you become more familiar with the taste of vegetables, and you will learn to like the flavor more, even without the sugar!
10. Just keep trying! We tend to like foods that we eat often or have at least tried multiple times. If you don't like the taste of a vegetable today, it doesn't mean you won't like it the next time you try it!

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*This article was written by Carrie Durward, Extension Nutrition Specialist*

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## **Using Herbs and Spices // Keep the Flavor, Lose the Calories**



HERBS & SPICES  
KEEP THE  
FLAVOR

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LOSE THE  
CALORIES

LIVE WELL UTAH

Charlemagne, Emperor of Rome, known for his good health, said, "An herb is the friend of physicians and the praise of cooks." Try these tips for using herbs as a healthy and flavorful alternative to fats, sugar and salt.

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If you are trying to find ways to lower the amount of sugar, fat, and salt in your diet, you may find that herbs and spices are a good solution.

## **Using Herbs to Reduce Fat, Sugar and Salt**

Fat, sugar and salt all add flavor to the foods we eat and enjoy. They also add calories and cholesterol. We can add flavor to many foods and decrease the fat, sugar and salt by using herbs and spices in many recipes.

One tablespoon of fat can equal 100 calories. A great substitute is to purchase fat-free salad dressing, margarine, yogurt, sour cream and cream cheese, then add flavorings of your choice with herbs such as thyme, rosemary or tarragon. You will be surprised at the great flavor they provide without adding calories.

Herbs and spices can also reduce the amount of sugar you may need in foods. Ginger, whether fresh or dried, is an excellent sweetener. Keep a little ginger root in your freezer and grate off the desired amount when cooking. Carrots, sweet potatoes and other foods combined with a little ginger root are sweet and tasty.

Herbs and spices can complement nearly all cooking. Using them will help reduce the amount of salt your recipe may need. You will find that you can flavor with the herb, then leave out some of the salt.

Experiment with spices and herbs in your sauces, vegetables, drinks or desserts. Keep in mind that the amount you use and when you add it to your ingredients will depend on if you are using fresh or dried herbs. If using fresh herbs, you will add three times the amount of dried. Dried herbs are added at the beginning of cooking, and fresh herbs are added at the end of the cooking time. Store fresh herbs in the refrigerator and dried herbs in the cupboard out of direct sunlight. If you add a little too much seasoning when cooking, throw in a piece of potato and let it absorb the extra flavor. Remove before serving.

These herbs are some that I wouldn't want to be without. They add flavor to many foods:

- **Basil** is absolutely essential for Italian cooking. I can't imagine a summer without fresh pesto.
- **Chives** are prized for both their extensive cooking applications and their gorgeous silhouette in the garden.
- **Cilantro** is used liberally in Latin American cooking, and its cool flavor is one of my year-round favorites. I love pomegranate and cilantro salsa.
- Tall **dill** plants waving in the breeze are a welcome sight in any garden. The seeds *and* herb are used in all sorts of vegetable recipes and bottled pickles.
- Although **mint** has the tendency to take over wherever it is planted, the aromatic herb adds pizzazz to summertime lemonade, smoothies and is refreshing in teas and many recipes.
- **Oregano** is another Italian food staple, and it's also wonderful in egg recipes such as omelets.
- Don't just use the little sprigs of **parsley** as plate garnish: toss it into salads, soups and vegetable recipes.
- **Rosemary** grows wonderfully in St. George. On the patio, it is sheltered from the winter cold and the summer

heat. Once your taste buds have experienced fresh rosemary, they will go on strike if you serve the dried variety.

- **Thyme**, growing in a garden, has an enticing aroma. It's also a favorite in fish recipes.

Try growing your favorite herbs in the yard, garden boxes, flower pots or even in the house. They add beauty, flavor, aroma and are a wonderful conversation piece.

## Minted Cucumber Salad

- 4 cucumbers, peeled, halved, seeded and sliced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh mint, chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 orange rind, grated
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup olive oil
- 1 cup red wine vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar substitute

Toss cucumbers in bowl with mint, rind and parsley. Whisk oil, vinegar and sugar substitute. Pour over cucumbers and chill for 4 hours.

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# Savor the Flavors of Fresh Herbs and Spices

Author – Carolyn Washburn



# SAVOR THE FLAVOR

cooking with herbs & spices

LIVE WELL UTAH

Among the most tantalizing smells and flavors that come from your garden or kitchen emerge from fresh herbs and spices.

These fragrant flavors add much to foods while helping cut back on fats, sugars and salts in recipes. Why not add some of the most used herbs and spices in your kitchen to your garden this year? You could plant fresh basil, oregano, mint and rosemary. These plants will add beauty to your garden and flavor to your foods.

An easy way to get started with herbs is container gardening. [Maggie Wolf and Teresa Cerny wrote an article](#) on herb container gardens. They list six ways to help your herbs be successful.

Choose herbs that grow in a compact habit. Herbs that are too tall can be out of scale with their container. While herbs that grow in a trailing matter can be a beautiful addition to your outside landscape, you'll want to consider where to place your containers, how to care for them and harvesting the herbs too.

The handy [Herb Container Gardens article](#) has answers plus a useful chart listing many types of herbs, their maintenance and how to harvest.

Speaking of harvesting herbs, did you know it's the oils from the leaves that give them their great aroma and flavor? You want these oils to be released during cooking, not during harvesting and storage. Exposure to light, overheating, bruising or cutting will release these oils before they are needed. Dennis Hinkamp references easy ways to harvest, dry, cook with and store your herbs in the article, [Getting the Most out of your Herbs](#). The article says, "Of course the optimal way to use herbs is to pick them from the garden immediately before cooking. Since most recipes are written using proportions of dry herbs, when you substitute fresh herbs, you'll need to add about three times as much as the original dry measure."

Are you adding herbs to your garden this year? What are you

some of your favorites to harvest and use?

[Find additional articles on herbs and spices here.](#)



Carolyn Washburn is a family consumer sciences agent for Utah State University Extension. Her responsibilities include financial management education, food safety and nutrition, healthy family relations, emergency preparedness and working with youth. Her goal is to help individuals and families become self-sustaining and resilient by being financially prepared and healthy for any emergency. She serves on the National Disaster Education Network and has just completed the new food storage manual for USDA. Her most cherished award is America's Promise, awarded by Colin Powell.