

## Now is the time to enjoy the flavors of fall

Is the aroma of autumn in your kitchen? This is one of the best times of the year to increase the variety and amount of fruits and vegetables in your meals and snacks. Buying fruits and vegetables in season means they will be a better quality and less expensive.

Autumn specialties include apples, pears, grapes, winter squash, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, broccoli, and of course, pumpkin. Apples, pears and grapes offer a natural and quick source of energy, and they are fat, cholesterol & sodium free! Cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and broccoli have “phytochemicals” that may decrease your risk of cancer. Winter squash has more calories than summer squash, but it also has more vitamins A, C and niacin too. Pumpkin is low in fat, cholesterol and sodium free, a good source of fiber and vitamin C and an excellent source of vitamin A.

- Look for firm squash and pumpkin that are heavy for their size and have a hard, tough skin.
- Keep cut-up fresh veggies in single-serving bags for quick snacks.
- Store grapes in a plastic bag in a refrigerator drawer up to one week or freeze them for a refreshing snack.
- Squash and pumpkin seeds can be toasted.

### Pumpkins

When you're picking out your pumpkins for Halloween, don't just think about carving that Jack O' Lantern, think about eating the very delicious and nutritious pumpkin puree and seeds! Look for the smaller sugar pumpkin varieties; these are the sweetest and best for baking. Try the recipes below to fully enjoy pumpkin's fall flavor. You can use the flesh or meat portion for pumpkin muffins, pudding smoothies, cheesecake and more. Use the pumpkin seeds as a salty snack, topping for soups and stews, in salads and as a topping for pumpkin muffins. Roasted Pumpkin Seeds (also known as pepitas)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Separate the seeds of a carved pumpkin from the stringy membrane and rinse the seeds to remove remaining membrane. Place seeds on a paper towel to dry for 20 minutes. Spray a cooking sheet with nonstick cooking spray and place the seeds in a single layer on a baking sheet. Lightly sprinkle with salt. Bake for 15-20 minutes until lightly browned. Cool and enjoy. Store extra seeds in an airtight container.

These are packed with iron, zinc and monounsaturated fats.

### Basic Pumpkin Puree

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Cut a small pumpkin in half, stem to base. Remove seeds and stringy membrane. Cover each half with foil. Bake foil side up, 1 hour, or until tender. Scrape meat from halves and puree in a food processor or blender. Strain to remove stringy pieces. Use in recipes or store in the freezer in freezer safe bags.

### Apples

Apples are another autumn favorite. One apple gives you about 20 percent of your daily fiber needs! They are also fat, cholesterol and sodium free. Choose apples that are firm, shiny and smoothskinned with intact stems. They should smell fresh, not musty. Keep them refrigerated in a plastic bag away from foods with strong odors and use within 3 weeks.

### Top 10 ways to enjoy apples

1. As is! Crunch into a delicious whole apple at snack time, mealtime or anytime at all.
2. As a side dish or on a sandwich. Try a raisin waldorf salad.
3. With peanut butter. This makes a delicious snack, but watch the calories in the peanut butter!
4. Dessert! Try making a crisp.
5. Dip them. Carmel is always popular for apple dipping.
6. Delicious Décor. Keep a bowl of the many different colors of apples on your kitchen counter, dining table or in the living room. Not only will it serve as a quick source for a healthy snack but it's also the perfect room accent.
7. Bake'em! Remove the cores, leaving a 1/2 inch of the bottom of the apples. Pour a small amount of brown sugar and butter into the hole. Place the filled apples in an 8x8 inch square baking pan and add 3/4 cup of water to the pan. Bake at 375 F for 30-40 minutes until tender, not mushy.
8. Toss'em into a Main Dish! Apples compliment chicken dishes especially well.
9. Grab the Kids for an Apple Tasting! Buy a variety of apples and cut each into slices. Place each variety on its own plate and tag. Have each child eat a slice of each variety of apple and vote for her/his favorite.
10. Applesauce — your way. Smooth or chunky? Low sugar or sugar-free? With raisins or cranberries? Just spice it up and make it your own.

### Other fall favorites to consider

Visit the Charlotte County Health Department at [www.CharlotteCHD.com](http://www.CharlotteCHD.com) for links to other resources on using fall fruits and vegetables and more fun ideas on healthy eating. You can link through “WIC & Nutrition.”

This good nutrition series is brought to you by the **Charlotte County Health Department**, WIC and Nutrition Department. Our vision is to have our community enjoy nutritious food, by helping you to make good nutrition fun! For more information, questions or comments call Sandy Brandt RD, LD at 941-833-2554. Watch this section for more great tips in the months to come!