

BROCCOLI

The folate, vitamin C and calcium in this member of the brassica or cruciferous vegetable family make it a pregnancy essential. Purple-sprouting varieties – staples of farmer's markets and farm shops – have a delicate texture and fine flavour, while larger headed calabrese are more widely available being easier to transport. Those who grow their own adore the purple-sprouting type; it fills the traditional gap in the vegetable season and can be harvested for several weeks.

GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY

Broccoli has the most nutrients of any vegetable. It is an excellent source of folate and vitamins C, K and beta-carotene. Additionally, it contains manganese, potassium, vitamins B2 and B6, phosphorus, magnesium, iron and calcium, plus omega-3 fatty acids. It is rich in fibre and contains protein. The combination of calcium and vitamin C is bone protecting and boosts the immune system. The phytonutrients found in broccoli, including sulforaphane and indoles, boost detoxification enzymes that protect the cells. The brassica also benefits the cardiovascular system, eyes and liver and promotes immunity. Japanese studies suggest that compounds in broccoli combat the bacterium *H. pylori*, a common trigger of gastritis, and at John's Hopkins University, extracts were used to heal sun-damaged skin.

BUYING NOTES

Choose the most compact and darkest blue- or purple-green heads, which are signs of freshness: fresh broccoli is some five per cent protein. The stems should be hard and dense, not floppy or light. A hole up the centre of the stem is a sign of age. Avoid yellowing florets; beta carotene clusters in the florets and a lack of colour signals a lack of the nutrient. Frozen broccoli florets are a good source of beta carotene.

GROWING AND HARVESTING NOTES

Because it overwinters, broccoli ties up space in the garden for a whole year so you might not want to grow it if you only have one bed. Sow in mid-spring to harvest from late winter and through the following spring. Broccoli needs plenty of moisture, and does well in humid climates and on clay soil. Net in early spring against hungry birds.

Harvesting is easy during pregnancy since you don't have to bend over. Pick before the flower buds open, the

clusters separate or the buds start to yellow, and do so frequently to encourage the plant to send out more shoots. Cut the main head first, then the side florets.

CULINARY DOS AND DON'TS

- Slice into florets and leave for 5 minutes before cooking to promote the availability of phytonutrients.
- Cook quickly (steam, sauté or stir-fry); phytonutrients are lost when broccoli is cooked for longer than five minutes. Steam to preserve folate and antioxidants and sauté or stir-fry in extra-virgin olive oil. In tests, this was the only oil that maintained the phytonutrient and vitamin C count of raw broccoli.
- Cook the slender flowering shoots upright, as for asparagus, or eat raw.
- If available, use the leaves as you would cabbage; they are a storehouse of nutrients.
- Don't microwave broccoli; in one study this reduced antioxidants by up to 97 per cent.



Sprouting broccoli with its many small clusters of buds and sprue-like stalk tastes especially fine – in 18th century England it was known as Italian Asparagus. Though the purple variety looks pretty in raw dishes, its colour fades in the pan. The tender leaves, stalks and heads are all edible.

QUICK AND EASY DISHES

- Dice raw broccoli and serve as crudités with dips.
- Toss blanched florets into salads with chopped sun-dried tomatoes and toasted sunflower seeds.
- Drizzle steamed florets with a sesame-seed dressing.
- Peel, julienne, steam and serve the delicious stem as asparagus.
- Top cooked broccoli with some grated mature hard cheese such as Cheddar or Parmesan.
- Blanch the florets and diced stem, then fry in olive oil with garlic; stir in anchovies and toasted breadcrumbs to serve.
- Dice a large floret and steam or boil with pasta for an avocado-like sauce.

CABBAGE, KALE AND BRUSSELS SPROUTS



BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Folklore has it that babies come from the cabbage patch – perhaps because the brassica or cruciferous vegetable family contains so many baby-nurturing nutrients.

Cabbage has been regarded as a cure-all since classical times; in pregnancy it is useful in reducing morning sickness and afterward in easing swollen breasts. The robust nature of kale suits hearty stews and winter vegetable soups while cabbage is a mainstay of Indian dishes; its flavour marries well with spices such as cumin and ginger. All provide vital nutrients, including folate, during the traditional lean months.

Add Savoy cabbage to your diet to counter cystitis, and after your milk comes in tuck a Savoy leaf into your bra to relieve painfully swollen breasts. Replace with a new leaf once it has become limp.

The cabbage family is beautifully ornamental in a winter garden, from the deep green crinkly leaves of the Savoy to the glossy heads of red cabbage and Brussels sprouts popping rose-like from their tall stems.

GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY

Cabbage, kale and Brussels sprouts are all amazingly rich in vitamins K and C, and contain manganese, B vitamins, folate, calcium and potassium. Cabbages contain omega-3 fatty acids, plus fibre and protein. The phytonutrients in cabbage, including sulforaphane and indoles, boost detoxification enzymes that protect the cells. The family also benefits cardiovascular, eye and liver health and promotes immunity. Red cabbage is rich in anthocyanins (which produce the colour) and has particularly high levels of vitamin C, though kale has the most antioxidants of any leafy green. The distinctive taste of Brussels sprouts is a result of the phytonutrient sinigrin, which some people find it very bitter.

PLANTING UP A CONTAINER



The principle is the same, whether planting up long, narrow window boxes or deep half-barrels. Before you begin, check that the container is large and deep enough for the plants you plan to raise, and make sure it has drainage holes. You will need someone to help you lift large bags of potting compost and manoeuvre containers into place.

1 Make sure the container is in its final position and have the plants or seeds ready nearby. Raise pots slightly off the ground with specially made terracotta 'feet', wooden blocks or house bricks, and place a drip tray beneath window boxes.

2 Place a layer of gravel or 'corks' – broken pieces of terracotta pot – at the bottom of the container, to aid drainage.

3 Add peat-free multi-purpose compost (or soil suitable for your plants) over the gravel or corks. Fill



to within 2cm of the top of the container, flattening down the compost with your hands to remove air pockets. Water well.

4 Sow the seeds into the compost following packet instructions or transplant young plants so they sit at the same level as in the pot. Cover seeds with a layer of dry compost, and firm the compost around young plants. Water carefully so as not to disturb the seeds or uproot the plants.



PLANTING UP A HANGING BASKET

Choose the deepest, widest basket you can find to cut down on watering – more soil means less moisture loss – and search out a lightweight potting compost. Before you begin, you may like to mix the compost with some water retention granules to cut down on watering later in the growing season. 'Tumbler' cherry tomatoes and dwarfing peas and beans look attractive trailing over the sides of the basket.

1 Stand the basket on a pot or bucket to keep it stable. Line the basket with fibre lining from a garden centre and heavy-duty plastic to retain moisture. Make some drainage slits in the bottom and sides of the lining.

2 Fill the basket half-full with potting compost and add up to three plants, depending on the size of the basket.

3 Top up the compost to within 2cm of the top of the basket. Firm around the plants and water well before asking someone to hang the basket (at a height you can reach). Feed weekly when the crops begin to set.



GROWING AND HARVESTING NOTES

Spinach and chard are incredibly easy to grow – some gardeners even consider them weeds because they self-sow if left to run to seed. As well as being low maintenance, they tolerate poor soil. You need never be without spinach if you plant summer and winter varieties; make several sowings for successional harvesting, but be vigilant during warmer weather, when plants have a tendency to bolt.

You can happily neglect Swiss chard as the leaves are rarely attacked by slugs. Plant in a planter or at the front of a border for show as well as easy picking. Chard is grown chiefly for the stalk; pull stalks when harvesting rather than cutting.



Chard either has dark green leaves and a bright red stem or crinkly green leaves attached to an enlarged white stem.

FOLATE-BOOST TONIC

This juice is a general tonic when you feel in need of pepping up. The spinach may ease constipation and strengthen bleeding gums; it is also valued for its skin-regenerating properties. Try to buy organic. You will need a juicer.

225g (½ lb) spinach
1 stalk celery
1 carrot
180 ml (6 oz) tomato juice
Worcestershire sauce (optional)

Wash the spinach leaves well and remove any thick stems. Place the leaves in a pan, cover and cook over a medium heat for 2–3 minutes. Put the carrot and celery through the juicer, then the cooked spinach. Pour into a jug and stir in the tomato juice. Pour into a glass over ice and serve with a few shakes of Worcestershire sauce, if using. Store any remaining juice in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.



QUICK AND EASY DISHES

- Spinach is very good with eggs; steam the leaves, then chop and stir in a little grated nutmeg and Parmesan, and top with poached eggs.

CULINARY DOS AND DON'TS

- Young leaves are most palatable. Discard the ribs of older spinach leaves before cooking.
- Eat spinach raw (after washing well) for maximum nutrient absorption.
- Combine spinach with a source of vitamin C, such as sliced red pepper, to boost mineral absorption.
- Drizzle spinach leaves with olive or walnut oil to promote the uptake of vitamin E and the phytonutrient lutein, which protects the eyes.
- Cook more spinach than you think you need to allow for shrinkage during cooking – about 225 g (½ lb) per person.
- Cut off the leaves and simmer chard stalks; serve like asparagus.
- Don't add water when cooking spinach, just rinse the leaves, place in a pan over a low heat and cover. Leave to sweat for a few minutes until the leaves have melted into a soft mound. Squeeze out the remaining moisture, chop and serve.
- The longer you store spinach, the less folate and fewer carotenoids. Chard keeps better than spinach.

BEETROOT

Another fabulous folate-rich food, beetroot comes into its own at lunchtime if you are prone to afternoon energy dips because it converts to sugar extremely slowly and keeps blood-sugar levels stable. The root has long been used medicinally to support the blood and digestion and as a natural laxative. One of the best reasons for growing beets yourself is to have a ready supply of young leaves: they are from the same family as spinach and Swiss chard. You won't find the leaves in supermarkets; indeed, they wilt so quickly they're rarely found at farmer's markets.

GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY

As well as supplying excellent amounts of folate, beets contain very good levels of manganese and potassium and are a good source of vitamin C, magnesium, iron, copper and phosphorus. The copper promotes uptake of the iron in red blood cells. The leaves are a great source of iron and calcium – they have more than spinach – and are very high in beta-carotene and vitamin C.

The red colour highlights the plant's beneficial properties. The antioxidant betalain pigments betacyanin (purple) and betaxanthin (yellow) support the liver and boost immune function. Antioxidant carotenoids and flavonoids also boost immunity and cardiovascular health and reduce inflammation. Beetroot seems to be able to neutralize dangerous nitrates if you've been eating processed meats.

A study by Barts and the London School of Medicine and the Peninsula Medical School found that drinking 500ml (18 oz) beetroot juice daily reduced blood pressure. University of Exeter research suggests that drinking the juice increases stamina, helping make

QUICK AND EASY DISHES

- Add raw grated beetroot to salads or stir into yogurt.
- Dress young leaves with olive oil, vinegar and seasoning.
- Roasting the root brings out its sweetness; chop and add to the roasting tin alongside other winter staples, such as carrots, parsnips, celeriac and pumpkins.



If growing your own, you can store any left-over roots in a cool, dark place. The traditional method is to store in the roots in layers in a box covered in sand.

strenuous activity less tiring (you might like to sip it in the early stages of labour).

Beetroot, especially the leaves, contains oxalic acid, which can prevent calcium and iron absorption. It is therefore recommended to wait for a few hours before eating iron and calcium-rich foods or to eat beetroot with a source of vitamin C (orange juice) to boost iron uptake. It will colour your urine and stools pink, but that's completely harmless.

BUYING NOTES

Small- and medium-sized beetroot are juicier than larger ones. Look for bunches with leaves – a clue to how old the roots are. The leaves should be fresh and springy to the touch. The root should be firm, unwrinkled and with no soft patches. Press the root before buying – lots of give means the vegetable is past its best. Avoid ready-cooked, vacuum-packed beetroot, which tend to taste of nothing or of vinegar.

GROWING AND HARVESTING NOTES

Sow in succession to ensure a crop from late spring to autumn. If at first the young plants seem to stall, let them be – they take a while to get going. Once they have, thin seedlings so they do not touch; this encourages the root to swell. You can leave the roots in situ into mild winters, though watch that they don't get too tough, or store in a sand-covered box.

Twist off the leaves rather than cutting to prevent the root from bleeding.

CULINARY DOS AND DON'TS

- Eat the leaves raw (after washing well) for maximum absorption of minerals.
- The root can be grated and used in salads.
- Combine the root with a source of vitamin C, such as broccoli, peppers and lemon juice to boost mineral absorption.
- Cooking increases the availability of beta-carotene and fibre but steam, microwave or roast to preserve the levels of vitamin C and B.
- Don't overdo the vinegar; this can drown the earthy subtlety of flavour.
- Don't boil the root; this will destroy vital nutrients.

PURPLE ENERGY JUICE

The nitrate in the beetroot has been shown to boost stamina, keeping you going when energy is flagging. Beetroot is also soothing for pregnancy constipation. The ginger in the juice helps to combat nausea. You will need a juicer,

- 1 medium raw beetroot (organic, if possible)
- 2 cm (¾ in) fresh ginger root
- 1 apple

Top and tail, then peel the beetroot (take care, the juice stains); peel the ginger and wash the apple. Put all the ingredients through the juicer. Store any leftover juice in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours.

PEAS AND MANGETOUTS

Not just excellent for healthy bones and a good source of folate, peas can be a tonic for the soul. What could be more uplifting than popping the juicy contents from a fresh pod straight into your mouth? Supermarket peas, however, generally lack the flavour and sweetness of home-grown ones or those found in farmer's markets. Pea pods make the perfect portable snack during pregnancy, as do mange-tout, the young pods eaten whole. Sugar snaps have a crunchier texture and are sweeter than garden peas.

GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY

A very good source of vitamins K and C, manganese, vitamin B1 and folate, peas contain good amounts, too, of vitamins A and B6, phosphorous, magnesium, copper, iron and zinc. The copper promotes the uptake of iron in red blood cells. Peas are great for fibre and protein and also contain antioxidant betalain and carotenoids, which support the cardiovascular and immune systems.

BUYING NOTES

Look for firm bright green pods; be wary of those that shake – the peas inside won't be fully grown. Frozen peas may be fresher, tastier and more nutritious than podded peas past their best. When selecting mangetout or sugar snap peas, choose smaller pods, avoiding those that are ready topped and tailed.

Eat the peas the day you buy the pods; they are tastiest when just picked.

GROWING AND HARVESTING NOTES

Peas like manured, well-dug soil with good drainage, so have someone fix this for you. Successional planting is essential to prevent gluts: sow every 2–3 weeks from mid-spring, or even earlier for a chance crop. Net young plants and mulch around them to cut back on weeding (they like it cool and damp). After picking, cut back the plants, but leave the roots in the ground to shed nitrogen into the soil. Follow on with a nitrogen-loving crop such as cabbage, spinach and lettuce. Don't plant peas in the same bed two years running.

To cut down on work, choose self-supporting varieties, which require less staking and make easier picking (no grubbing around under collapsed pea sticks). You can pick young shelling peas to eat as mangetout, or grow specific mangetout varieties.

Pick regularly to encourage the plant to make more flowers. Pick mangetout when the pod is still flat, but



the first bumps of young peas are pushing through. They should snap crisply. Or leave to mature and pick to shell. Once pods fade from bright green, the peas will be tough. To harvest dried peas: Leave on the plant; once pods have dried to a husk, cut off the whole plant and hang until completely dry. Pod the dried peas and store in an airtight jar in a cool, dark place ready to be rehydrated by soaking.



CULINARY DOS AND DON'TS

- Eat freshly picked peas raw for the sweetest taste.
- Add uncooked mange-tout to salads.
- Cook fresh peas only 2–3 minutes in boiling water.
- Throw a few empty pods into the cooking water for flavour.
- It's traditional to cook peas between layers of firm-leafed lettuce leaf; add a couple of tablespoons of water for steaming.
- If cooking mange-tout, steam or stir-fry.

QUICK AND EASY DISHES

- Serve peas with a little butter and a few torn leaves of fresh mint.