

Food & Drink

They're the perfect summer veggies

Whether it's a patio dinner on a warm summer evening, or a picnic dinner packed for a walk in the park or a stroll to the water's edge, the best summer meals cut kitchen time so that you can enjoy summer's charms. And with so much fresh Ontario produce to choose from, your summer dining options are virtually unlimited in taste and variety. Broccoli and cauliflower are at their peak of perfection, and they go well together in lots of ways.

Try these summer dinner winners:

- Go Italian: A good wine, some crusty bread and an antipasto platter can add European flair to your summer table.

Your platter can include Ontario tomatoes, zucchini, green onions and parsley, all dressed in olive oil blended with white wine vinegar, garlic, thyme and a little honey; steamed Ontario cauliflower with olives, red pepper, carrot strips and capers dressed in olive oil and white vinegar; steamed Ontario broccoli, with sun dried tomatoes, fresh basil, olives and prosciutto dressed in olive oil and garlic; and hard-boiled eggs, steamed Ontario green beans and a selection of cold cuts.

Finish the meal off with fresh Ontario peaches or melon, cheese

and strong coffee for a genuine Italian touch.

- Summer's salad days: There are as many salads as there are cooks to prepare them.

Opt for traditional lettuce-based salads, dressed with grilled chicken, beef, pork or fish. If pasta salad is your favorite summer pleasure, try penne with Ontario tomatoes, cucumber, fresh basil and tarragon, olives and diced mozzarella drizzled in olive oil and white wine vinegar, or rotini with roasted red peppers, garlic, tomatoes and zucchini in a dressing of red wine vinegar, mint, olive oil, salt and pepper.

- Or try the tasty and colorful Sicilian cauliflower recipe below, or the succulent broccoli cauliflower casserole.

If you're a vegetable purist, fresh Ontario broccoli and cauliflower gently steamed to perfection is a great option.

Steaming stacks up well against boiling: more of the vitamins stay in the vegetable rather than ending up in the water, and proponents say texture is firmer and taste isn't as "watered down."

Use a simple steaming basket, available for a few dollars, or opt for special-purpose steaming pots or stackable Chinese bamboo steamers. Steaming is surprisingly

fast — keep a close eye so water doesn't boil dry, and veggies don't end up overcooked.

And if you're a little more adventurous than the purists, boost the flavor of your Ontario steamed vegetables this way:

- Add a little wine to your steaming water.

- Try a seasoned butter dabbed lightly over your just-steamed vegetables.

- Zing it up with a vinaigrette dressing over hot or cold steamed vegetables.

- For some Asian flair, try a little sesame oil and some soy sauce over still-hot veggies.

MMM GOOD: Frank Hulshof shows off the broccoli, cauliflower and assorted cabbages he and his sons produce on their 50-acre spread north of Stouffville on Bloomington Road.

Photo by SJOERD WITTEVEEN



CAULIFLOWER SICILIAN STYLE

This colorful red, white and green dish tastes as good as it looks. Serve with egg noodles and fresh fruit salad for a fast, easy meal.

Preparation time: 20 min.

Cooking time: 25 min.

1 tbsp (15 mL) vegetable oil

1 small onion, thinly sliced

1 garlic clove, minced

1 small head Ontario cauliflower, broken into florets

1/2 cup (125 mL) water

2 medium tomatoes, diced

1 small green pepper, cut into chunks

2 tbsp (25 mL) chopped fresh parsley OR 2 tsp (10 mL) dried parsley flakes

1 tsp (5 mL) dried basil

1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried oregano

1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt

Meatballs:

1 lb (500 g) lean ground beef

1/3 cup (75 mL) fine dry bread crumbs

1/3 cup (75 mL) skim milk

1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt

1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried basil

1/4 tsp (1 mL) pepper

1/4 tsp (1 mL) garlic powder

Combine meatball ingredients in medium bowl. Form into about 16, 2-inch (5-cm) meatballs. (Meatballs can be made to this point and refrigerated.)

Heat oil in a large, deep skillet or pan over medium heat. Add meatballs and cook 8 to 10 min. or until done, turn meatballs frequently to brown all sides. Remove meatballs to a separate dish and keep warm.

Drain all but 1 tbsp (15 mL) fat from pan. Add onion and garlic; sauté 2 to 3 min. Add cauliflower and water; cover and steam over low heat 5 to 6 min., until tender. Add tomatoes, green pepper and seasonings; cook and stir 4 to 5 min. until pepper is tender-crisp. Return meatballs to pan with vegetables and toss. Serves 4.

RECIPES

BROCCOLI AND CAULIFLOWER CASSEROLE

Yield: 8-10 servings

Ingredients:

2 1/2 (625 mL) cups fresh broccoli

2 1/2 cups (625 mL) fresh cauliflower

1 cup (250 mL) processed cheese

1 can Cream of celery soup (8 oz.)

2 tsp (10 mL) prepared horseradish

Topping:

1/3 cup (75 mL) canned fried onions

Lightly grease a 2-qt. (2L) casserole.

Cook the broccoli and cauliflower until tender-crisp. Drain and run under cold water. Place in the casserole.

Conventional Method:

In a saucepan, heat the soup over medium heat. Add the cheese. Stir until it has melted completely. Stir in the horseradish.

Stir the sauce into the vegetables until they are completely coated.

Bake the uncovered casserole in a pre-heated 350 degree F (180 degree C) oven for 20 minutes. Sprinkle on the topping. Bake 5 minutes.

Microwave Method:

In a large bowl, micro the cheese and soup on high for 5 minutes until the cheese is completely melted. Stir in the horseradish.

Stir the sauce into the vegetables until they are completely coated.

Cover the casserole with wax paper. Micro on high for 8 minutes. Stir once. Sprinkle on the topping. Micro uncovered on high for 2 minutes.

HINT: Using frozen vegetables means you can enjoy this all year. Use 1 package (20 oz.) of both frozen broccoli and cauliflower and cook according to package directions.

Try exotic fruits for appetizing variety

It's a running joke at my aunt and uncle's house — my lunch is so big, we need a crane to lift it out.

Consisting mainly of traditional fruits like apples and grapes, I often think I would like to try more exotic fruits.

The following is a guide to different fruit from Evan MacDonald, owner of The Village Grocer. **Starfruit:** is grown in the West Indies and is available all year. Starfruit is ready "when it looks like it's ready to be thrown out." When the fruit is yellow, the flesh is tart. Starfruit is the sweetest when the points are brown. The whole starfruit (including the pits) can be eaten.

Mangoes: grow in any tropical, temperate climate. The fruit is large, oval and slightly flat. The fruit can be green with red hues, yellow or red.

This sweet and juicy fruit tastes like a cross between pure vanilla, peach, pineapple and apricot. Mangoes, which are reaching their peak, should be peeled and the hair-like seed taken out. The flesh

Food for Thought



Lisa Cartwright

is then eaten. The fruit shouldn't have any soft spots, but should give when touched. You can also tell this fruit is ready by the smell. **Papayas:** The best papayas come from Hawaii and are available all year. They're pear-shaped and ripe when bright yellow and soft. They can be eaten whole or with white meats. Papayas have a natural tenderizing ingredient.

Figs: come from Italy, Greece and California. Black and green figs are now available and are squat and tapered to the stem. The figs are ready to eat when they are soft to touch and nectar comes from the bottom. Figs should be slit open and the insides eaten. The skin can be eaten, but most people don't. Figs are good with ham or cured meats.