



Focus on Food & Wellness

OH UMAMI! Fresh (Diet-Friendly) Flavor Enhancers

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All the healthy ingredients in the world won't matter to me in the end: If food doesn't taste good, I won't want to eat it. Glance at the standard restaurant menu, and you know what drives our taste buds – butter, cream, fried-food, salt, sugar, gooey cheese, and seared meat. We are literally hard-wired to enjoy and desire these foods. Unfortunately, the excess to which we eat them wreaks havoc on the body with inflammation, nutrient-devoid calories, immune suppression, and more.

When I began my own 25-pound weight loss journey with our first Move It & Lose It Series in 2009, I learned how to integrate some healthier, lighter flavor-enhancers into my daily fare. (I credit the folks at EatingWell for my inspiration. Visit www.eatingwell.com for recipe examples of these flavor-enhancers in action.) I'm pleased to join Chef Mike to lead our upcoming Kitchen on a Mission cooking series and share these secrets with you. Let's face it, we all know what we need to eat to be healthier (more vegetables...). What we need are quick, easy, delicious recipes we'll want to make over and over again.

Start Fresh: Most restaurant and processed fare rely on flavor enhancers to cover up cheap, bland food. If you start with farm-fresh fruit, vegetables, and other quality ingredients, your dishes will automatically taste better.

Real Broth: Simmer poultry, fish, or meat bones and/or vegetables (including winter squash seeds, onions, carrots, veggie ends) for a few hours, then add salt and seasonings to taste. Freeze in small containers and use this as a base for soups, stews, cooking rice, making sauces, etc. (In a pinch, the Co-op's array of prepared broths and bases are handy, but homemade will be even better.) Also save leftover wine to use in dishes to deepen the flavor of dishes. Try white wine in pasta sauces and to steam seafood. Simmer red wine in meaty stews. Brandy, port, and red wine add surprising flavor for sauces and help deglaze pans and make gravy.

Shave a Little Extra Flavor: Invest in a microplane grater and add a smidge of flavor-packed ingredients atop a dish. Stir in lemon, orange, and lime zest just before serving soups, stir-fries, and pilafs. Parmesan or romano for pasta and pilafs. Dark chocolate on fruit salad or a sorbet.

Add Some Acid: A splash of lemon juice or quality vinegar immediately brightens and accentuates the saltiness of the dish. Stir a little bit in just before serving. Fresh-squeezed citrus is

best, but you may want to keep a bottle of lemon juice in the fridge for convenience.

Sweeten without Sugar: For sweet-savory dishes like potato-kale soup and Indian dishes, try sautéing whole or freshly ground fennel seeds, then begin adding in ingredients. Fried or simmered cinnamon sticks infuse sweet spicy flavor into up curries and Asian dishes. Stir powdered cinnamon into oatmeal and apple dishes to limit or eliminate the amount of sugar needed. Of course, fruit can also add just the right amount of sweetness to a dish. Try mangos or pineapple in a stir-fry or some berries on your salad.

If You Must Use Sugar: Add just a tiny amount of sugar, maple syrup, or honey at the very end of cooking a recipe to get the maximum flavor impact from the least amount of sweetener.

Smarter Salt: Get more flavor out of your salty seasonings by using soy sauce (I particularly like Bragg Liquid Aminos), seaweed, and gomasio. You can make your own gomasio by dry roasting hulled sesame seeds in a skillet until golden and adding salt to taste. Delicious on top of salads and to season vegetables and stir fries!

Browned Food Tastes Better: Chef Mike often reminds us that browned food tastes better. It pleases our taste for umami (savory, meaty flavor). Keep this in mind when sautéing and roasting vegetables, grains, even spices. Just make sure it doesn't burn!

Creamless Cream: Expand your avocado repertoire beyond guacamole. The creaminess benefits many dishes, though it's best used raw. Sneak a few slices into your smoothie, use it as a sandwich spread, and toss it into salads. Look to Greek yogurt as a substitute for cream, sour cream, and ice cream in almost any recipe, such as fettuccine alfredo, oatmeal, apple desserts, fruit salad, burritos, creamy dressings... but be aware that excess heat will cause it to curdle. Eggs can also add smooth, creamy flavor to some dishes. Throw one in at the end of a stir-fry, drizzle or poach one in soup, or chop a hard-boiled egg into a salad. Play with nut butters and alternative milks. Or take it halfway and replace heavy cream with milk or half-and-half thickened with cornstarch.

Make Up for It with Herbs & Spices: Garlic and onions quickly boost flavor, but broaden your taste buds with the flavor palette in the spice cabinet. Try paprika-garlic-cayenne-oregano-black pepper-cumin on Mexican food, coriander-fennel-turmeric for Indian, cinnamon-star anise-clove-black pepper in Chinese, basil-oregano-thyme for Italian... other combos I particularly like are rosemary-turmeric and cumin-coriander for seasoning roasted chickpeas, meat, vegetables, and whole grains. ■

More recipes at www.WintergreenBotanicals.com and on the Co-op's Eat Well Buzz Blog at coopeatwell.blogspot.com.