

Week Four Newsletter

Cooking with Specialty Crops

Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, herbs, and other foods that are grown for direct consumption rather than large-scale commodity production. These crops are often rich in nutrients, full of flavor, and versatile in the kitchen. In West Virginia, many farms produce specialty crops such as apples, peaches, berries, tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, squash, and herbs like basil, mint, and parsley. Because these crops are often grown locally and harvested seasonally, they are typically fresh, flavorful, and ideal for home cooking.

Cooking with specialty crops allows individuals to explore a variety of tastes, textures, and colors in their meals. Fresh fruits can add natural sweetness to dishes, while vegetables and herbs can enhance savory flavors without the need for excess salt or processed ingredients. Incorporating these crops into everyday cooking can make meals more interesting, nutritious, and connected to the local food system.

Only 10% of Adults

in the U.S. meet vegetable
intake recommendations



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Culinary Benefits of Specialty Crops

Specialty crops play an important role in creating flavorful and balanced meals. Fruits such as berries, apples, and peaches can be used in breakfast dishes, desserts, or salads, adding natural sweetness and important nutrients. Vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, and squash provide rich flavors and vibrant colors that make dishes more appealing. Herbs such as basil, mint, and parsley add fresh aroma and taste while also providing vitamins and antioxidants.

Simple cooking techniques can help preserve both flavor and nutritional value. Methods such as roasting, steaming, sautéing, or grilling bring out the natural taste of fruits and vegetables while maintaining many of their nutrients. Cooking with a variety of specialty crops also encourages people to experiment with new recipes and ingredients. Trying different crops throughout the year helps create a more diverse and balanced diet while highlighting the flavors of seasonal foods grown in West Virginia.



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Bringing Specialty Crops into Your Kitchen

Incorporating specialty crops into everyday meals can be both easy and enjoyable. Fresh berries or sliced apples can be added to yogurt, oatmeal, or smoothies for a healthy breakfast. Tomatoes, peppers, and herbs can be used to create sauces, salads, or roasted vegetable dishes. Squash and pumpkins can be roasted, blended into soups, or added to casseroles and baked goods. Even small additions of herbs can elevate the flavor of many meals.

Local resources can also help you discover new ways to cook with specialty crops. Visiting farmers markets allows you to see what fruits and vegetables are in season and talk directly with farmers about how they recommend preparing their crops. Community cooking classes, nutrition workshops, and local extension programs can also provide recipes and tips for preparing fresh ingredients. By exploring different crops and cooking techniques, you can enjoy flavorful meals while supporting local agriculture and strengthening your connection to West Virginia's food system.

