

wvfarmers.org



WEEK THREE

Nutritional Benefits of Specialty Crops

Information provided with funding provided by USDA Specialty Crop

Week Three Overview

- **Purpose and Goals:** The purpose of this session is to help participants understand the nutritional value of specialty crops and their role in a healthy, balanced diet. Participants will explore how locally grown West Virginia crops can improve health, support local agriculture, and be incorporated into everyday meals.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Identify the vitamins, minerals, and health benefits of various specialty crops
 - Explain how specialty crops contribute to a balanced and nutritious diet
 - Discuss practical ways to incorporate nutrient-rich crops into meals
 - Recognize the benefits of locally grown West Virginia specialty crops for both personal health and community food systems



Specialty Crop Overview

Specialty crops are fruits, vegetables, herbs, nuts, and other crops grown primarily for direct consumption, rather than commodity production. They are often locally grown, versatile, and nutrient-rich, making them valuable for both home gardens and local food systems.

Popular West Virginia Specialty Crops:

- Apples & peaches
- Berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries)
- Tomatoes & peppers
- Pumpkins & squash
- Garlic
- Leafy greens
- Carrots



Nutritional Benefits of Specialty Crops

Specialty crops provide essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants that support overall health.



Apples and Peaches contain fiber, vitamin C, antioxidants for heart and digestive health



Tomatoes and Peppers contain lycopene, vitamins A & C that promotes heart and skin health



Pumpkins and Squash contain beta-carotene (vitamin A), potassium, fiber that is good for vision and immunity



Nutritional Benefits of Specialty Crops

Specialty crops provide essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants that support overall health.



Tomatoes contain high levels of vitamins A and C, and antioxidants



Persimmons are a fruit that are high in antioxidants and often used to make jams and jellies



Garlic are a good source of vitamin B6 and other antioxidant-producing compounds



Nutritional Benefits of Specialty Crops

Specialty crops provide essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants that support overall health.



Berries contain antioxidants, vitamin C, and manganese that support brain function and reduce inflammation



Leafy Greens (Kale, Spinach, Lettuce) are nutrient-dense and vitamin-packed



Carrots are high in beta-carotene and recognized for their sweet flavor and high nutritional value



Specialty Crops and a Balanced Diet

Specialty crops play an important role in maintaining a healthy, balanced diet. They are nutrient-dense, flavorful, and versatile, making it easier to meet daily nutritional needs.



How Specialty Crops Support a Balanced Diet:

- Boost nutrient intake – Provide essential vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber that support digestion, energy, and overall wellness.
- Support disease prevention – Rich in antioxidants and phytonutrients, specialty crops can help reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.
- Encourage local and seasonal food consumption – Eating crops grown locally in West Virginia promotes freshness, supports farmers, and reduces environmental impacts.
- Enhance overall meal quality – Incorporating specialty crops into breakfast, snacks, salads, soups, and main dishes improves both taste and nutrition.





Discussion Prompts: Nutritional Benefits of Specialty Crops

- How do different specialty crops contribute to your overall health and well-being?
- What do you notice about the nutrients and benefits of fruits, vegetables, and herbs you eat regularly?
- How might including a wider variety of specialty crops change the way you plan meals or snacks?
- In what ways can “eating a rainbow” of fruits and vegetables impact your diet or lifestyle?
- How do you currently use specialty crops in your cooking, and what new ideas could you try?
- What challenges or opportunities do you see in adding more nutrient-rich crops to your meals?



Activity: Nutrition Workshop

Overview: Participate in an interactive nutrition workshop to learn about the health benefits of specialty crops and ways to incorporate them into your daily meals.

Workshop Focus:

- Understanding Nutrients – Explore the vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants found in West Virginia specialty crops.
- Meal Planning & Incorporation – Discuss creative ways to add nutrient-rich fruits, vegetables, and herbs into breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.

Workshop Goals:

- Experience the nutritional value of specialty crops firsthand
- Learn practical strategies to increase intake of nutrient-rich foods
- Discuss and plan ways to incorporate specialty crops into home meals

