

Florida Food Fare

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Broccoli

Description: The name "broccoli" comes from the Italian word for "cabbage sprout". Broccoli is a relative of cabbage, brussel sprouts and cauliflower. This deep emerald-green vegetable (which sometimes has a purple tinge) comes in tight clusters of tiny buds that sit on thick edible stems. While this crop is primarily produced in other regions of the United States, a small acreage of broccoli is produced in Florida during the winter months for fresh use.

Availability: Fresh broccoli is available in the supermarket year round with a peak season from October through April. Broccoli can also be purchased frozen.

Nutritional Value: Broccoli is an excellent source of vitamins A and C and also riboflavin, calcium and iron. One cup of chopped broccoli contains approximately 24.6 calories, 2.6 g dietary fiber, 42 mg calcium, 286 mg potassium and no cholesterol. It also yields 82 mg vitamin C, 62 mcg folate, 1356.9 IU vitamin A and 4.6 g carbohydrates.

Selection and Care: Look for dark green or light purplish heads with tightly closed buds. Stalks should be tender yet firm with unwilted leaves. Toughness and woodiness develop with age and usually the toughest part is at the lower portion of the stalk. Yellowish buds or leaves indicate poor quality or over-maturity. Avoid broccoli with soft, slippery watersoaked spots on the bud cluster. Broccoli is one of the most perishable commodities grown for the commercial market. It is best to purchase only what is needed for immediate use. Refrigerate broccoli unwashed, in a plastic bag up to 5 days or freeze for longer storage.

Preparation and Use: To preserve nutrients, use fresh broccoli as quickly as possible and keep cooking times short. Wash broccoli and remove the end of the stem. Cut into individual

flowerets or spears. Every part of the vegetable can be used. Broccoli can be steamed, stir-fried, boiled, microwaved, baked or eaten raw as part of a vegetable tray. However, recent studies have found that steaming broccoli resulted in the least amount of health promoting chemicals lost while microwaving resulted in the greatest loss of beneficial flavonoids. For salads, cook then chill immediately in a bowl of ice water. Season with your favorite dressing, or margarine and fresh herbs.

Recipes:

Broccoli in Herbed Butter

1 pound fresh broccoli cut into spears	1 1/8 teaspoon dried basil*
2 tablespoons butter or margarine	1/8 teaspoon dried thyme*
1 1/2 teaspoons lemon juice	1/8 teaspoon dried marjoram*
1 1/2 teaspoons onion, finely chopped	

Steam broccoli until crisp tender. Melt butter; add lemon juice, onion and herbs. Put broccoli in serving dish and add butter mixture, stir to coat. *If using fresh herbs increase measurement by 3-4 times.

Cream of Broccoli Soup

3 tablespoons unsalted butter	1 1/2 to 2 cups steamed broccoli flowerets
1 cup chopped onion	Salt and white pepper to taste
1 potato, peeled and diced	1/2 cup fat free half and half
2 cups chicken stock	

In a large saucepan, melt butter. Add chopped onion and cook until tender. Stir in diced potato and liquid. Bring to a boil and simmer until potato is tender. Stir in broccoli and return to a simmer. Puree soup in batches in a blender and return to saucepan. Leave some of the vegetables not pureed if a chunkier soup is preferred. Season soup with salt and pepper and finish with half and half. Serve warm with french bread and a salad.

Pasta and Vegetables

12 ounces of penne or ziti pasta	1/2 teaspoon sugar
2 tablespoons olive oil	2 cups broccoli flowerets
1 1/2 cups chopped onion	2 cups chopped zucchini
3 cloves garlic, minced	1 cup snow peas
3 chopped plum tomatoes	1/2 cup julienne carrots
1/2 cup water	2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

Cook pasta according to package directions. While pasta is cooking, heat oil in a 3 quart saucepan. Add onion and garlic and cook, stirring until softened. Add tomatoes, water, salt, and sugar. Cook, stirring often, for 10 minutes. Add broccoli, zucchini, snow peas, carrots and parsley. Cook, stirring until vegetables are tender-crisp. Stir in the parmesan. Serve immediately over hot pasta. Serves 4.

Broccoli and Rice Casserole

2 onions, chopped	1 can low salt cream of mushroom soup
2 Tablespoons butter	2 pounds chopped, cooked broccoli
2 cups cooked brown rice	1/2 cup low fat cheddar cheese grated

Sauté onions in butter. Mix with rice, soup and broccoli. Pour into 2-quart casserole dish. Salt and pepper to taste. Top with grated cheese. Bake uncovered 40 to 45 minutes at 350 degrees F.