

CARRUTHERS



SEASONAL NEWS

The majority of the UK population grow up in urban areas, with little or no awareness of when and where various foods are produced. Imports from around the world ensure that supermarket shelves look the same week in week out. There are many reasons why you should aim to eat local and seasonal food; to reduce the energy needed to grow and transport the food we eat, to avoid paying a premium for food that has travelled a long way and to support the local economy. But most importantly, because seasonal food is fresher and tastes SO much better!

Carruthers aims to promote an understanding of food seasons. Each month we will focus on the fruit and/or Veg, which is currently in season, and share enlightening facts, useful tips and enticing recipe ideas picked from the web and our favourite publications. When a food is in season its

quality can vary dramatically. Food produced locally, e.g. bought from a farmers' market, is likely to be a lot fresher than its supermarket equivalent. Each fruit or vegetable has a prime time when it's at its seasonal best. Some are great for over half of the year; others only hit their peak for a month.

Perhaps the most compelling argument of all is that of simply supporting British producers.

In recent weeks UK retailers started rationing lettuce, courgettes, broccoli and other greens. A combination of storms and flooding in southern Europe is said to have created the "perfect storm" of poor growing conditions. After the floods came the cold. Freezing conditions across Spain and Italy wreaked further havoc on crops, and that was made yet worse by Murcia suffering its largest snowfall in decades. Farmers were unable to drain the land meaning that they could not get back out there and grow more crops.



Poking out of the rock-hard ground and covered in snow, these Spanish vegetables haven't made it to markets.
(DailyMail 3-2-17)

Alex Fairfull director at Carruthers warns that vegetable shortages could last for months as growers in Spain struggle to recover from the weather.

During the winter months, Spain's south-eastern Murcia region supplies 80% of Europe's fresh produce. But after suffering its worst precipitation 30 years, Murcia's growing fields will be unable to meet demand for a number of months. The effects of these shortages are particularly pronounced in Britain, which imports an estimated 50% of its vegetables and 90% of its fruit.

What is the impact on prices?

A spokesman from New Covent Garden market at the time of the crisis , said: "Whereas normally courgettes are £9 or £10 [a crate], they peaked at around £22 and we're struggling to get them. Traders also said they were struggling to meet demand and were planning to import produce from the US"

This struggle in Europe has caused wholesalers to turn towards the United States for their vegetables, which is considerably more expensive. This has led to an increase in prices in markets and noticeably in British supermarkets.

The problem was possibly made worse by an increase in demand at this time of year because of healthy fad diets

Consumers across the UK have complained on social media about a lack of courgettes in supermarkets and online retailers. This relates in particular to "courgetti" – where the vegetable is cut into thin ribbons providing a low-carb alternative to spaghetti. Why not trying making this low carbohydrate substitute to pasta when courgette are in season this Summer.





Might this be the wake up call that the UK needs! Could we try to become more self sufficient and less reliant on imported fruit and vegetables? If we could revert back to eating wherever possible home grown crops then we would not miss the odd courgette in the winter.

Rob Moore, co-founder at Eat Seasonably, told The Independent: "We've become increasingly disconnected from our food and its relationship with nature – we're accustomed to buying whatever we want, whenever we want.

We at Carruthers suggest that British consumers should learn from the past and current shortages of imported vegetables to try wherever possible this March/April to buy greens that are currently growing in season in the UK, such as kale, purple sprouting broccoli and cauliflower.

What's in season this Spring in the UK

Asparagus, broccoli, mushrooms, jersey royal new potatoes, chicory, cabbage, leeks, spinach, spring onions, sorrel, purple-sprouting broccoli, new potatoes, cauliflower, radishes, carrots, watercress lettuce & salad leaves such as rocket and red chard.

Rhubarb, Conference pears

TOP 10 HOME GROWN WINTER VEGETABLES

Chard



Also known as Swiss chard, leaf beet, spinach beet and seakale beet, this leafy green vegetable is related to the sugar beet, and has large, tough leaves that taste a little like spinach, but slightly sweeter. Younger leaves can be eaten raw in salads; the

fleshy stalks are usually cooked separately, as they take longer to soften. Chard is packed full of vitamins and minerals, and should be briefly boiled or sautéed to retain as many of these as possible.

Leeks



Packed with anti-oxidants and vitamins, the mighty leek can help stave off winter colds. It's also the perfect partner to potatoes and cheese for deeply satisfying side dishes and suppers.

Our quick and tasty tips:

Add chopped and boiled leeks to mashed potato with a good knob of butter and plenty of black pepper.

Try wrapping parboiled leeks in smoked ham, pouring over a bit of white sauce, sprinkling over breadcrumbs and baking until golden brown. Great with bread and butter.

Leeks are an absolute must as they're great for combining with, for example, potato for soup, chicken for pies, a rich cheese sauce – they're also excellent just sweated off with butter and black pepper.

Kale



Kale will stand through the winter before running to seed in spring. The leaves are of the darkest bottle green and the taste is as robust as the veg itself – great with liver and bacon or a hearty lamb stew. Grow yourself some sturdy plants by autumn, and they stand there, proud as you like, till they run to seed in

spring. By that time you'll have had multiple winter harvests from them.

Whip up a quick summer kale sauté with garlic, olive oil, tomatoes and basil. Sauté kale with small amounts of bacon for flavour, then lightly braise it in vegetable stock to soften.

Savoy cabbage



Pleasingly wrinkly to the touch and nutty to the taste, the Savoy makes a mighty fine guest at any meal, particularly Sunday lunch. Cabbage can be sliced, lightly boiled or steamed and dressed with butter and black pepper – casserole fodder like no other.

Our quick and tasty tips:

Fry finely sliced cabbage with pancetta and finely sliced garlic—this works brilliantly with game.
Stir fry finely shredded cabbage with garlic, ginger and a little sesame oil - delicious served with chicken or salmon.

Brussels sprouts



Fresh herbs, onion and bacon pair beautifully with Brussels sprouts. This vegetable loves the cool weather of fall and early winter. If you can find them still attached to the stalk, don't be intimidated—buy them, as they're likely more fresh. All you need to do is slice off each sprout with a paring knife. Sprouts contain high levels of vitamins A and C, folic acid and dietary fibre, and can help protect against colon and stomach cancer.

Spinach



Used in almost every cuisine across the world, spinach is an enormously popular green vegetable. The leaves can be either flat or slightly ruffled, and are a bright green when young, deepening to a more intense

colour when older. The bitter flavour is distinctive - and particularly complements dairy products and eggs.

The milder, young leaves can be eaten raw in a salad, while the older ones are usually cooked (spinach has one of the shortest cooking times of all vegetables).

NUTRITION

Spinach is well known for its nutritional qualities. Vitamins A and C are present in significant amounts, as are several antioxidants and folic acid.

Parsnips



Coming in to a steaming bowl of curried parsnip soup is blissful after a spell out in the cold, so make sure you have a row of these hearty roots handy.

Pale yellow or ivory in colour and shaped like a slightly bulbous carrot, parsnips are one of the tastiest and most appealing root vegetables.

Cheap and simple to prepare, their soft, fragrant, slightly sweet flesh adds a warm, comforting element to dishes. Parsnips are a good source of vitamin C, fibre, folate and potassium (increased potassium in the diet is associated with a lowering in blood pressure)

Jerusalem artichokes



Introduce them gradually into your diet, because they contain inulin rather than starch and once this reaches our large intestine, digestive bacteria have a bit of a party converting this into gas. Lots of gas.

They're delicious roasted, having a sweet, nutty, melting flesh a little like a mild parsnip. I've not tried them as a soup yet but apparently this is good, too.

Cauliflowers



A brassica, like cabbage and broccoli, cauliflower is a mass of tiny, tightly packed flower heads (called curds), which grow from a thick central stem to form a single, round head,

cupped by green leaves. It has a firm, almost waxy texture, and a mild, delicate flavour. Most cauliflowers are white, but it's also possible to find green and purple varieties, as well as the sweeter Romanesco cauliflower, with its distinctive pointed florets. Like all brassicas, cauliflower smells very unpleasant if overcooked, so brief cooking is essential.

OUR FEATURED SEASONAL VEGETABLE

Purple Sprouting broccoli



After a fairly sparse couple of months on the leafy veg front, the start of the purple sprouting broccoli season marks a welcome addition to the winter vegetable palate. Simply

steamed or boiled, it partners almost any fish or meat dish, yet can also take centre stage.

HISTORY

Purple sprouting broccoli was initially cultivated by the Romans. Broccoli has been grown in the UK since the early 18th century, although the purple sprouting variety has only risen to prominence in the last 30 years.

BIOLOGY

Broccoli is a cruciferous plant, in the same family as the cabbage, and is closely related to the cauliflower.

TIPS

BUYING

Purple sprouting broccoli is especially good when young and tender. Look for darkly coloured specimens with crisp stalks, no bigger than 1cm in diameter, which snap cleanly when broken. Reject bendy broccoli.

STORING

In the fridge for up to a week.

PREPARING

Split thicker stalks about halfway up so that they cook at the same time as the heads. Steam, stir-fry or boil in a

small amount of water. The tasty leaves are edible and so do not need to be removed.

MISCELLANY

Broccoli comes from the Italian word brocco meaning branch or arm. Roman epicure Marcus Gavius Apicius, creator of one of the earliest known recipe books, describes preparing broccoli "with a mixture of cumin and coriander seeds, chopped onion plus a few drops of oil and sun-made wine."

NUTRITION

Cruciferous foods are now hailed as having a number of important health benefits. Purple sprouting broccoli contains the phytochemical sulforaphane (thought to help prevent cancer) and may provide resistance against heart disease, osteoporosis and diabetes. It is packed with vitamin C and is a good source of carotenoids, iron, folic acid, calcium, fibre and vitamins.

PURPLE SPROUTING BROCCOLI WITH CHILLI, LIME AND SESAME DRESSING

METHOD

First prepare the broccoli by cutting it into even-sized pieces – stalks and all.

Then place the saucepan fitted with a fan steamer on the heat then add the broccoli and pour in about an inch of boiling water from the kettle then sprinkle with salt. Put a lid on and time it for about 4 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the dressing, you need first of all to toast the sesame seeds. To do this use a small, solid frying pan, pre-heat it over a medium heat without oil, then add the sesame seeds and toast them, moving them around in the pan to brown them evenly. As soon as they begin to splutter, pop and turn golden, they're ready, which will take about 1-2 minutes. Then just remove them to a serving bowl and simply stir in all the rest of the ingredients.

When it's cooked, remove the broccoli from the steamer and transfer to a warm serving bowl. Then drizzle over the dressing all over. Toss it around and serve straight away.



INGREDIENTS

12 oz (350 g) purple sprouting broccoli
salt

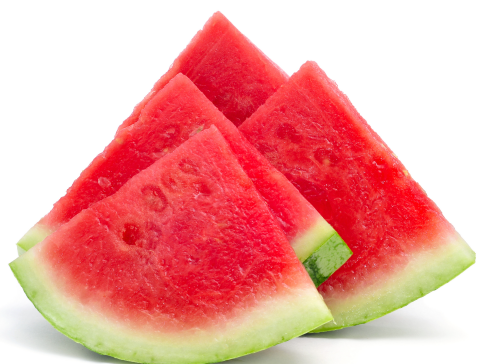
For the dressing:

1 level teaspoon sesame seeds
1 dessertspoon sesame oil
1 dessertspoon lime juice
1 teaspoon Thai fish sauce
1 dessertspoon Japanese soy sauce
1 small red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped

SIMPLE IDEAS FOR FRUIT PREPARATION

In our school catering units there is a strong emphasis on delivering and preparing fresh nutritious food, however with time always a premium this can be a challenge. Our suggestion is that Caterers keep it simple.

Chose a different 2/3 from a selection of fruit such a honeydew melon, watermelon, pineapple, kiwi, grapes, oranges, strawberries, apples, pears, grapes and bananas and quite simple wash the skins then cut into chunks that kids can pick up and eat. This way of eating allows kids to move about and even take a few pieces if fruit out outside as they play.

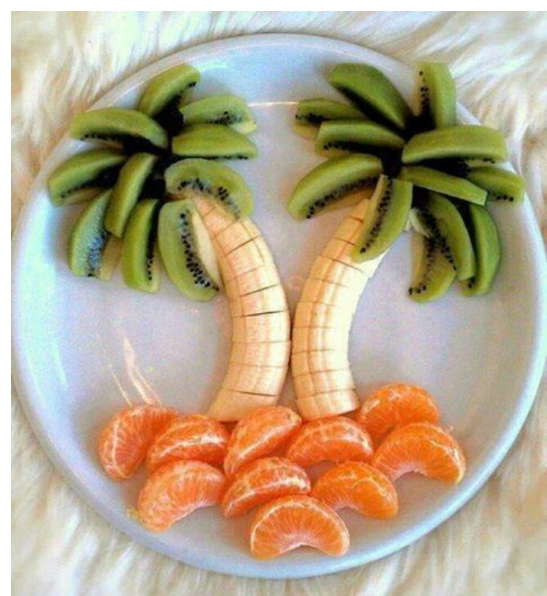


Arrange loosely on a platter.



Or for younger children make up one of the displays below, and arrange the fruit ready for the children to assemble in class with the Teachers supervision before eating.

FUN IDEAS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

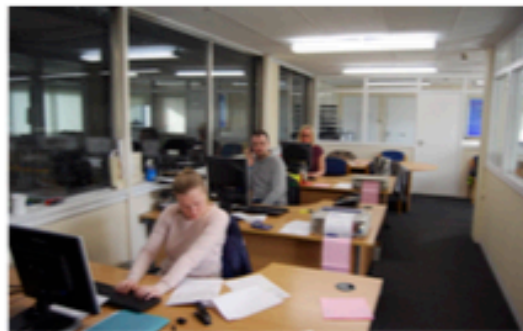




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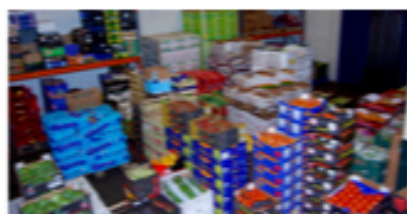
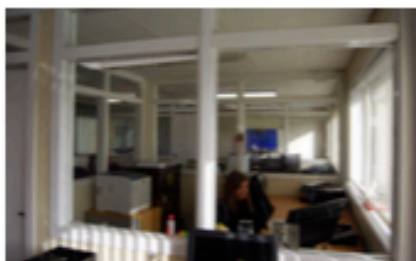
Produce & Displays





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Team & Premises



Happy Easter!



From the Carruthers Team!