

## **Grow a rainbow for good health.**

“Eat your vegetables!” How many of us heard our parents say this when we were children? How many of us said this to our own children? I doubt anyone said, “Eat your red, orange, yellow, green, and purple vegetables.”

Eating vegetables in a variety of colors is good for us. Eating a vegetable *rainbow* ensures we get the essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber that give us boundless energy and help us ward off illness and disease.

Let’s plant a vegetable garden that would make Roy G. Biv proud.

### **Red**

Vegetables are red due to a plant pigment called lycopene. Lycopene is an antioxidant that may reduce the risk of heart attacks and some cancers.

Red vegetables – beets, radishes, red cabbage, red peppers, red tomatoes and watermelon – also offer vitamin C, betaine for heart health, folate, and flavonoids that reduce inflammation.

### **Orange & Yellow**

Orange and yellow vegetables are colored with carotenoids. Carotenoid-rich food is good for healthy eyes, may reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer, and improve the body’s immune system.

Orange and yellow vegetables – carrots, pumpkins, some squash, sweet potatoes, yellow peppers and yellow tomatoes – also contain vitamin C.

### **Green**

Green vegetables are colored with chlorophyll. They are rich in vitamin K, folic acid and potassium. Folic acid helps prevent neural tube defects; vitamin K is needed for the formation of blood clots; and potassium improves heart health.

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower contain indoles and isothiocyanates that help protect the body from some types of cancer. Some leafy greens, broccoli, cucumbers, celery, kale, peas, green peppers, some squash, and zucchini contain lutein. Lutein is related to beta-carotene and vitamin A.

Kale is a powerhouse of nutrition. It is jam-packed with vitamins A, C and K, iron and a wealth of antioxidants including carotenoids and flavonoids.

### **Blue & Purple**

You will have to look to fruit for most of the blue in your diet, but eggplant and purple cabbage can be the purple on your plate. An anthocyanin called nasunin colors them purple. It protects cells from damage, lowers cholesterol, and reduces the risk of cancer, stroke and heart disease.

### **Plant your own rainbow.**

Choose the space with the most sun. Most vegetables grow best in full sun. Root vegetables, like beets, carrots and potatoes, produce in half a day of sun; leafy vegetables, like kale, lettuce, spinach and Swiss chard, grow in filtered light. Position the garden near a source of water so you water when you should.

Prepare the soil before planting. Incorporate lots of organic matter into the soil to make it more hospitable to growing roots. Mushroom compost, leaf mold, and homemade compost are all good choices. If seeds are being planted, be sure the top couple of inches are especially fine.

Many vegetable seeds can be planted directly in the garden. Plant them according to the directions on the seed packet. Once seedlings emerge, remove some so the remaining plants have room to grow.

Plant transplants on a cloudy day with little wind. Gently firm the soil around plants and water thoroughly so moisture makes it way down to their roots.

Apply fertilizers to increase the fertility in the soil. There are many kinds of fertilizers available in many forms – fertilizers formulated for specific vegetables and balanced fertilizers. Apply them according to package directions – more is not better.

Keep weeds out of the garden. Besides looking unattractive, they compete with vegetable plants for water, light and nutrients. They may also harbor pests and diseases. Control weeds by hand pulling or hoeing.

Protect your vegetables from pests and diseases. Grow resistant varieties. Keep vegetable plants happy with proper watering. Apply organic insecticides and fungicides when necessary.

Plant colorful vegetables this year and enjoy good health at the end of the rainbow.

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