

# Appetite for Knowledge



## EATING WITH THE SEASON: SPRING

I hope we are about to say goodbye to the snow and hello to spring, which has finally officially arrived. With it comes a variety of peak produce. I love the concept of eating in season. It means eating more flavorful produce that is at its peak freshness with its highest nutritional value! You can't go wrong eating seasonal foods, especially in spring when some of the most mouthwatering fruits and veggies are appearing in the produce section of the market.

Spring is the time of year when people begin gravitating towards lighter and fresher foods. We move away gradually from hearty soups and thick casseroles to salads and simpler preparations.

Let's look at some of the foods that are in season during the spring. The availability of course will vary a bit from region to region but in general, these are the fruits and vegetables you will find in abundance this time of the year.

**Apricots** – For a boost of beta-carotene, potassium, vitamin C, and fiber in a sweet 50-calorie bundle, be sure to bring home apricots. Desserts, jams, meats, parfaits, sandwiches, smoothies, snacks,

salsas, and salads will all be just a bit sweeter and delicious with apricots.

**Artichokes** – Artichokes may look a little unique, but that doesn't mean you should be hesitant to buy them! Artichokes are high in antioxidants and make a delicious snack. A 2-ounce serving (approximately the size of the bottom of one large artichoke) has about 3 grams of fiber and just 25 calories. Artichokes are also a good source of iron, potassium, magnesium, folate, and vitamin C.



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**Asparagus** – Asparagus is amazingly versatile: it can be steamed, simmered, roasted, battered, grilled, sautéed, or wok-fried. Thinly sliced, it's even wonderful raw in a salad. Asparagus definitely have a royal nutritional profile. Low in fat and high in fiber, these tender stalks are a good source of iron, B vitamins, and vitamin C.

**Avocado** – One-third of a medium avocado has 80 calories and contributes nearly 20 vitamins and minerals, making it a great nutrient-dense food choice. Avocados can act as a “nutrient booster” by helping increase the absorption of fat-soluble nutrients like vitamins A, D, K and E in other foods. Avocados are rich in monounsaturated fat that is easily burned for energy.

**Bok Choy** – A deep green leafy vegetable that resembles Romaine lettuce on top and a large celery on the bottom, bok choy is a crucifer more closely related to cabbage. It contains vitamins C, A, and K, and is a source of calcium, magnesium, potassium, manganese, and iron.

**Mushrooms** – With their meaty texture and umami-rich flavor, mushrooms have long been a staple flavoring agent. The nutrients vary among the species. They contain fiber and some vitamins, including niacin, vitamin C, and some minerals, including iron and selenium. Very low in calories, 1-cup of sliced raw white mushrooms has about 15 calories, no fat, 2 grams of carbs and 2 grams of protein.

**Peas** – Due to their sweet flavor, ease of cooking, and versatility, peas are a wonderful spring treat to include in your spring-time meals. Like most legumes, peas are low in fat and high in fiber and are a good source of plant protein. Their nutritional profile differs depending on variety, with green peas providing more B vitamins and zinc, while snow and snap peas offer more vitamin C.



**Rhubarb** – Although technically a vegetable, rhubarb is often used as a fruit and is a source of vitamin C, potassium, and manganese. One of the drawbacks is that because it is so tart, most recipes call for more sugar than most other desserts. A 1/2 cup serving without sugar is only 29 calories, but with sugar, it is 139 calories. By combining the stalks with sweeter fruits, like strawberries, the sugar content can be lowered quite a bit.

**Scallions** – Scallions go by many names, including spring onion and green onion. Scallions are low in calories, but contain a good amount of vitamin K, fiber, vitamin C, vitamin A and folate. One cup of chopped scallions contains approximately 32 calories. Add scallions to your meals to give your food more flavor and texture.



**Spinach** – Although it is available year-round, spinach is at its freshest and most tender in early spring. Low in calories but packed with nutrients, spinach is one of a number of leafy vegetables. Spinach is a good to an excellent source of vitamins A, C, and folate, as well as minerals such as manganese, magnesium, calcium, zinc, and iron. It is also a good source of fiber and even contributes a small amount of protein to the diet.

**Strawberries** – Strawberries are extremely versatile when it comes to cooking and packs a huge punch of nutrition. They are the most popular berry in the world. Strawberries are low in calories, rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals such as vitamin C, folic acid, potassium, and are packed with antioxidants, such as anthocyanins, and quercetin. They have a lot less sugar than the majority of other fruits.

**Sweet Cherries** – One cup of succulent sweet cherries with pits has about 90 calories with an ample supply of fiber, protein, and vitamin A and C, says the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

These delicious seasonal fruits and vegetables have tempting flavors and fabulous health benefits. In addition, they are sure to banish the long winter blues when they start showing up at your local market!

#### Sources

- USDA Seasonal Produce Guide, [snaped.fns.usda.gov/seasonal-produce-guide](https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/seasonal-produce-guide)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, [USDA.gov](https://www.usda.gov)



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