

SMART choices

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Mexican Food: Hearty, Nutritious and Low-Cost

Tacos and burritos, topped with layers of high-fat cheese and sour cream, typically come to mind when most of us think of Mexican food. But these aren't the "traditional" Mexican foods. Foods commonly prepared in Mexico are high in both flavor and nutrition and low in cost and fat.

Mexico's food history dates back far before the discovery that the world wasn't flat. While ingredients have changed with the introduction of new foods by explorers and conquistadors, the staples of the Mexican diet haven't changed.

Mexican cooking uses few dairy foods. In fact, an estimated two-thirds of Mexico's population is lactose intolerant. Legumes, such as black, pinto and kidney beans, and nuts or seeds, are primary sources of protein, although seafood is also popular in the coastal regions of Mexico. When meat is used, it's generally tough, so it's prepared by marinating, slow cooking, chopping, grinding, or slicing thinly. For many poor Mexicans, there is very little variety in their diet. Many people live almost entirely on corn, beans and

squash. One-dish meals are common, and casseroles are often made of stale tortilla pieces, rice or macaroni when available.

Traditional Mexican recipes include the basics of corn, beans, tomatoes, squash, peanuts, chilies, fresh herbs and avocados. In most of Mexico, the diet now also includes garlic, onions, citrus fruits, and tortillas and breads made from wheat flour. With little preparation, these inexpensive foods can add variety to your diet and increase nutrition.

Simple Mexican dinner ideas:

- Drain and rinse a can of pinto or black beans. In a medium-sized tortilla, add a small amount of shredded cheese, a handful of the beans, some frozen corn, and a couple of tablespoons of salsa. Fold in half, heat on both sides in a skillet, cut, and serve.
- To jazz up a jar of salsa, add some frozen corn and drained canned beans, such as kidney beans.
- When cooking rice, add a can of tomatoes with green chilies to the cooking

liquid. For a quick one-pot meal, include some frozen veggies and beans to the mix.

- To increase nutrition (and decrease cost) of taco meat, use half the usual amount of meat and add some drained canned beans. You will increase fiber and decrease fat as well!
- Drain canned tomatoes (reserving the liquid for soup or stew for later use) and mix into scrambled eggs. Try adding some canned green chilies if you're feeling adventurous.
- A squeeze of lime goes a long way! A traditional Mexican dinner includes lime wedges for added flavor and to cool spicy foods. Lime juice will also add some vitamin C to the meal!



Mom's MyPyramid Plan

How much of which foods should moms eat when they are pregnant or breastfeeding?

Moms can use the free MyPyramid *Plan for Moms* program to make a customized plan. Log onto <http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramidmoms/index.html> and click *MyPyramid Plan for Moms* in the left menu.

First the program will ask for information such as age and weight. Based on this information, the program will create a personalized MyPyramid for each trimester of pregnancy. The MyPyramid eating plan shows how much food from each food group is needed for good health while you're pregnant or nursing. Plus there are tips to help moms find foods they'll like to eat in each food group.



Personalized eating plan for you and your baby

WIC Food Packages...Time for a Change!

The NH WIC Nutrition Program food packages are changing in healthy ways to meet the nutrition needs of WIC mothers, infants, and children.

The new food packages will match the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and contain less fat and cholesterol, more fiber, and fruits and vegetables year round. The foods for breastfeeding mothers and infants will increase as well, to promote breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed infants.

The new foods will be provided to WIC families starting in the summer of 2009.

The new foods will include:

- Fruits and vegetables, including fresh, frozen, and canned
- Whole grain cereals
- Whole grain breads
- Baby food fruits, vegetables and meats
- Soy beverages and tofu
- Brown rice, bulgur and oatmeal
- Soft corn and whole wheat tortillas
- Canned beans
- Canned salmon, sardines and mackerel

If you are a pregnant woman, new mother, or have a child less than five years old, please call the WIC Program to see if you are eligible. Seniors 60 years and older may be eligible for the Commodity Supplemental Food (CSFP) Program. Families and seniors will also receive the free coupons for fruits and vegetables through the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in the summer months.

Call 1-800-942-4321 or 603-271-4546 today!





Spring Seasonal Foods Quiz

Test your knowledge about local foods in New Hampshire.

Quiz

questions:

- 1.** All of the following are great reasons to buy local foods EXCEPT:
 - a. Buying local helps support the local economy.
 - b. Buying local reduces fuel use and is better for the environment.
 - c. Local fresh fruits and vegetables are healthy choices.
 - d. There are no fresh, local foods available in the spring in New Hampshire.
- 2.** What fresh fruit is available year-round in New Hampshire?
 - a. Pears
 - b. Apples
 - c. Strawberries
 - d. Melons
- 3.** True or false: Fresh asparagus, while delicious, provides little nutritional benefit.
- 4.** A local food, considered a delicacy, available from early spring into early summer is:
 - a. Saskatoons
 - b. Asian pears
 - c. Fiddleheads
 - d. Kale
- 5.** True or False? You need a map, a global positioning system and galoshes to find local foods in New Hampshire in the spring.

answers:

1. D. Available fresh local vegetables in May include artichokes, asparagus and rhubarb, as well as greens and fresh herbs. There are also many other locally-produced foods such as cheese, breads and pasta available year-round!

2. B. Fresh apples, when stored properly in a cool, dark place, can be bought year-round without losing much nutritional value. Apples in New Hampshire are grown locally throughout the state, as well as in Massachusetts and New York.

3. False. Asparagus is a nutritional powerhouse loaded with fiber, Vitamins C and K, as well as folate. It is also very low in calories at only 43 calories per cup!

4. C. Fiddleheads are available in New Hampshire from April until June. Fiddleheads are the young, coiled fern leaves of the

ostrich fern. It is important to cook fiddleheads in boiling water for 10 minutes, or steam for 20 minutes, to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. The taste of fiddleheads has been described as similar to asparagus, green beans, artichokes and mushrooms, or a combination of them!

5. False. Most markets throughout the state carry local foods. If you have trouble locating items in your market, ask the store manager. Additionally, local farmers' markets, as well as community-supported agriculture, are a great way to get fresh foods while getting to know your farmer!

Check out the location of local food farmers' markets at:
<http://lightenupnh.org/FoodNutri/main.cfm>



Mexican Black Bean Soup

(Servings: 6 one-cup servings) *At just 32 cents per cup, it's a nutritious bargain!*

Black beans – 15.5 oz can
 Tomato puree – 15.5 oz can
 Chicken broth – 1 cup
 1 large onion – chopped
 Oil – 1 tablespoon
 Cumin – 1 teaspoon
 Garlic – 1 clove finely chopped
 Salt – to taste
 Pepper – to taste

- 1** In a medium-sized pot, slowly cook the onions and garlic clove in the oil.
- 2** Add all the rest of the ingredients and simmer for 10-15 minutes.
- 3** Take half the soup and blend in an electric blender for 30-60 seconds (if you don't have a blender, mash half the soup mixture).
- 4** Pour the blended soup mixture into the pot with the unblended soup mixture. Stir and simmer for another 5-10 minutes.
- 5** Serve in individual bowls with a spoonful of low-fat sour cream.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 120, Fat: 3 grams (0 grams saturated), Carbohydrate: 16 grams, Fiber: 5 grams, Protein: 6 grams, Cholesterol: 0 milligrams, Sodium: 720 milligrams



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Dear Reader, Smart Choices is a periodic newsletter specially designed to give you the information you need to improve you and your family's nutrition without increasing the amount you spend on food. We hope you find it informative, useful and entertaining, and we welcome your comments. The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact 1-800-852-3345 x4238.