

FALL INTO THE BOUNTY OF AUTUMN

You ate the foods of summer – now feast on the fruits of fall

By Diane Saenz

Autumn is a time for subtle change. A season that transforms the way we witness and experience the world around us.

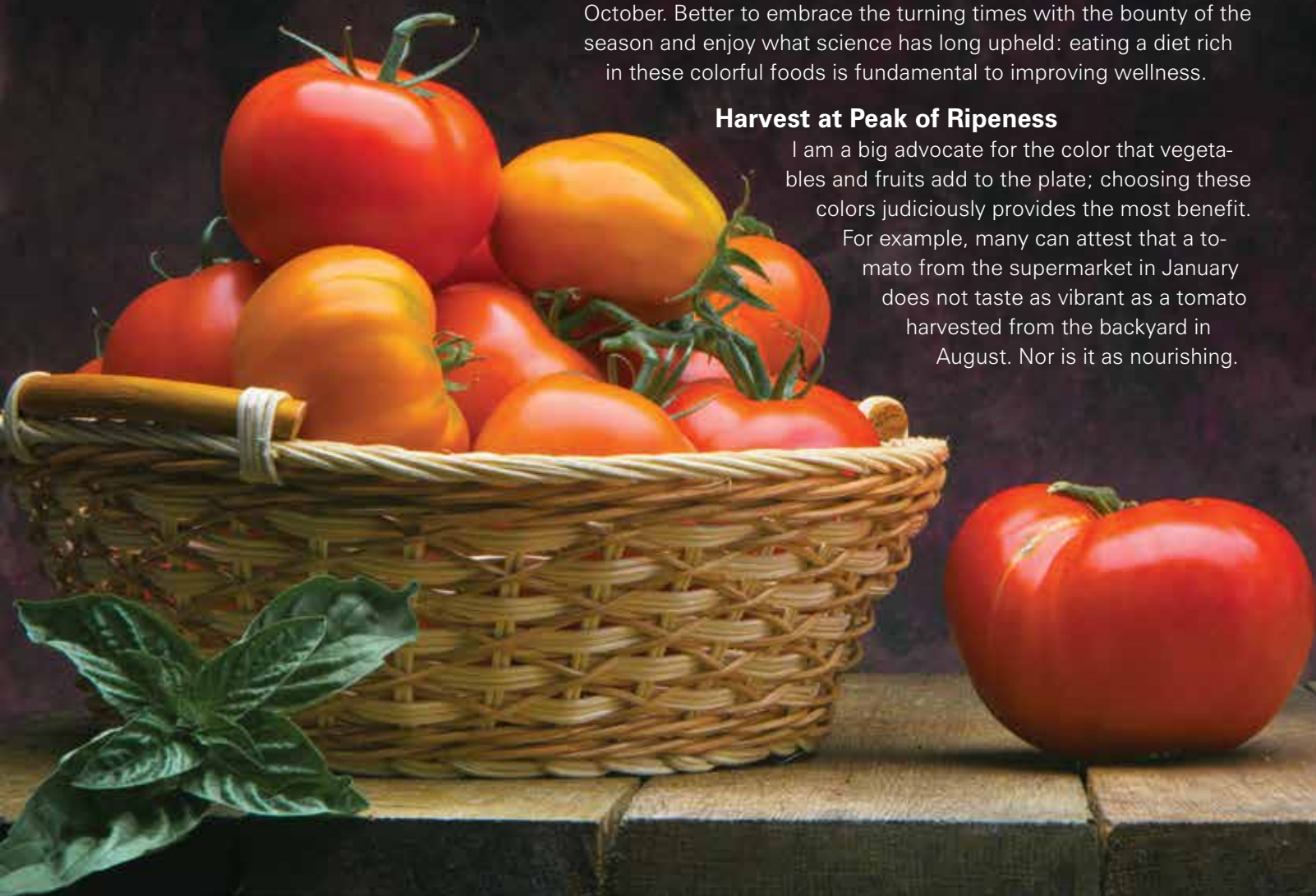
The leaves are turning; the air feels crisp on the skin and even the sounds of nature change. These senses – sight, sound, and touch – are easily influenced.

Just as remarkable is the season's sway on taste.

Cool weather inspires warm, nourishing meals, and nothing nourishes the body quite like fresh vegetables and fruits. For many, a snappy tossed salad is not going to do the trick in the middle of October. Better to embrace the turning times with the bounty of the season and enjoy what science has long upheld: eating a diet rich in these colorful foods is fundamental to improving wellness.

Harvest at Peak of Ripeness

I am a big advocate for the color that vegetables and fruits add to the plate; choosing these colors judiciously provides the most benefit. For example, many can attest that a tomato from the supermarket in January does not taste as vibrant as a tomato harvested from the backyard in August. Nor is it as nourishing.



Produce picked at the peak of ripeness is packing the most flavor and nutrients the conditions it was grown in will allow. This is especially true for produce bought near home or grown in your garden. Traveling long distances does not bode well for nutrients or flavors. By eating the colors of the season, you capitalize on enjoyment and health.

What about Fall?

This is all well and good in late summer when harvest is peaking but now that fall has arrived in Wyoming, what is one to do? Farmers markets are shutting down and home gardens are being put to rest.

How does one continue to eat fresh?

Learn which vegetables and fruits are in season – the choices are more than one might think. Beets, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts are only the beginning! Cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, potatoes, parsnips, pumpkins – the roll goes on.

Your best friend is a seasonal ingredient list. Websites such as epicurious.com have interactive maps that help nail down options. Another way



to hone seasonal skills is keeping current with what is on sale in produce departments.

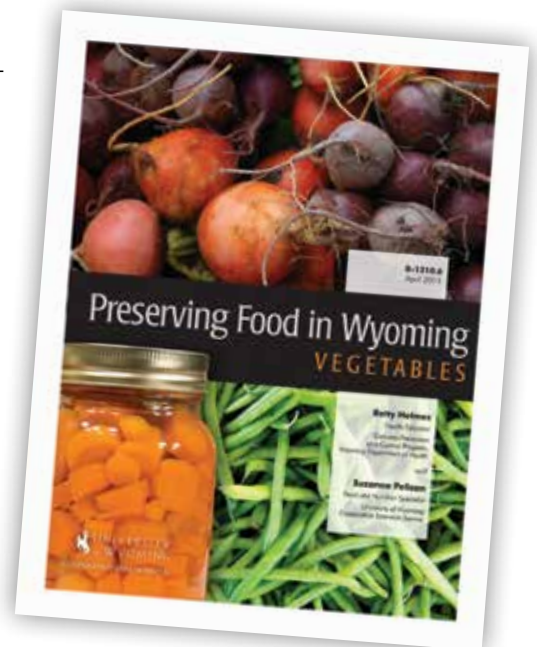
Plan Ahead

Many of these fall vegetables are cool-season crops, crops particularly suited to Wyoming's cool climates and short seasons. Planning ahead and planting some of these vegetables in the garden so they are ready to harvest in fall will give a plentiful supply of fresh produce. Season-extension techniques can help push harvest into early winter for select vegetable crops.

Once what is available in the market or what will be ready in the garden is identified, pick something and learn to cook it well. For autumn, roasting is a simple cooking method that can capture the spirit of the season. You will be amazed at how flavors intensify with just a little salt, pepper, and olive oil. Try roasting any of these: cauliflower, broccoli, winter squash, beets, parsnips and/or Brussels sprouts. I can almost guarantee taste buds will dance with delight. Even so, don't limit yourself to this technique. Try different recipes, talk to friends, attend a community culinary-education workshop, or contact your local UW Extension office and request a Wyoming Local Foods Guide. This free resource has a wealth of information on purchasing, storing, and cooking local foods.

Learn About Food Storage, Preservation

For kitchen enthusiasts inclined to resourcefulness, here is another tactic: learn more about home food preservation and proper food storage techniques. Canning, drying,



freezing, and fermenting skills are must-haves in a seasonal eater's toolkit. Alternatively, a root cellar is akin to a rite of passage for those who enjoy taking advantage of the season's bounty. Learning these skills will expand seasonal eating options exponentially. Visit <http://www.wyomingextension.org/eatwyoming> or contact your UW Extension nutrition and food safety educator for reliable resources. These educators often host hands-on workshops that can get folks started on the right track.

Eating with the Wyoming seasons is sure to add zeal to a kitchen and vitality to life. Feel inspired to use vegetables and fruits when they are at their best, taking advantage of the many ways to dish up a seasonal find. Learning to adapt standard meals and test new foods can take some time. Enjoy the process. You may be pleasantly surprised as you run into a new food to call a favorite and reap the health rewards of autumn's bounty.

Diane Saenz is the University of Wyoming Extension nutrition and food safety educator for southeast Wyoming and a food enthusiast who enjoys sharing in and guiding the joy of cooking and eating fresh. Has she aroused an interest in fresh fall produce? Do you have questions? She can be reached at (307) 328-2642 or at dsaenz@uwyo.edu.