

Menu Planning for December

If you're planning your menu for December, there are a few holidays to consider and many fresh fruits and vegetables continuing their summer peak.

Plan for December:

Full Moon – December 6th, Moon before Yule, Long Night or Cold Moon

National 'Hi Neighbor' Month

- December 4th - National Cookie Day
- December 7th – Pearl Harbor Day
- December 16th – Hanukkah begins
- December 21st – Winter Solstice

- December 24th – Hanukkah ends
- December 25th – Christmas
- December 26th – Kwanzaa, Boxing Day, National Whiners Day
- December 27th – National Fruitcake Day
- December 31st – New Year's Eve

Plan ahead for January:

Full Moon – January 5th

- Known as the 'Old Moon' or Moon after Yule

- January 1st – New Year's Day
- January 3rd – Fruitcake Toss Day
- January 19th – Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday

National Oatmeal Month

National Soup Month

The beginning of the citrus season..... Hardy greens including kales, chicories and spinach.

Yummy winter cardoon (cardoni), fennel and roots are also available.

No matter where you live, winter is the time that our biological clocks encourage us to hunker down, eat more calories and enjoy our sleep. The longest night of the year is Winter Solstice on December 21st, after that we begin to swing back towards longer days, inching towards spring. But while we're in the middle of winter, be sure to enjoy the rich and deep flavors that roasting, braising and other slow-cooking, low heat methods can bring to these delicious foods.

Braises, stews, soups and casseroles all benefit from long and low heat cooking styles. Oven roasting slowly converts the internal starches of root vegetables to sweet sugar and even Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower are better when they're roasted. Balance the flavors and the colors of these roots and brassicas with kales and endives slowly sautéed with a hint of balsamic or citrus for a fresh flavor. As pumpkin fades from availability, think about substituting with a different winter squash; what about red kuri pie or make butternut squash bread instead of pumpkin bread. Be innovative and willing to play with these flavors.

Fruit is amazing this time of year – as long as you love citrus! Grapefruit, oranges, kumquats, lemons, limes all are available and just getting better as the winter progresses. The only challenging variety is the Blood orange – culinarians hold their breath, waiting for the first harvest of lightly pink fruit – This year it's the first week of December. The reason this fruit usually appears so late is that its' red color is induced by frost temperature cold (below 33° F) and there's a chemical reaction with the naturally occurring *anthocyanin* in the orange. Farmers consider the blood orange season to be February to May (but with the Australian crop, the season can be started early or extended for menus).

Consider using dried fruit to enhance and deepen flavors. Nuts are delicious and when toasted, they are a great way to enhance every menu item and add protein to vegan baking. Beans, freshly dried from the fall harvest, add flavor and a vegetarian protein source to the winter offerings. Enjoy the hearty, rich and deep flavors of the winter season; before you know it, we'll be looking for ramps and fiddleheads again.

The following items *should* be available for the month of December. Remember that availability projections are based on annual history and sometimes the weather patterns and other acts of the universe can change access to quality produce. The items noted in **BOLD** should be the best values for the month of November.

Planning for December: (**BOLD** below is the peak season and usually more economical.

Apples - Crab
 Apples, Late Season CA
 Artichokes – large
Asian Pears
 Avocados
 Beans – Cranberry
 Beans – Romano
 Beets
 Broccoli
 Broccolini
 Broccoli Rabe
Brussels Sprouts
 Cabbage
 Cactus Leaves
 Cactus Pears
 Cardoon (Cardoni)
 Carrots (all colors)
 Cauliflower
Celery
 Celery Root
 Chayote Squash (Merleton)
Chestnuts
 Chicory
 Chili Peppers
 Citrus - Grapefruit
 Citrus - Kumquats
 Citrus – Lemons
 Citrus - Limes
 Citrus – Navel Oranges
 Citrus – Oroblanco

Citrus - Pummelo
Citrus – Satsumas
 Citrus – Tangerine
 Cranberries
 Cucumbers
 Endive
 Escarole
 Feijoa
 Fennel
 Garlic
 Greens – Chard
 Greens – Collards
 Greens – Kale
 Greens - Rapini
 Horseradish
 Jicama
Kiwifruit
 Kohl Rabi (purple and green)
Leeks
 Mushroom – Black Trumpet
 Mushroom – Chanterelle
 Mushroom – Hedgehog
 Mushroom – Hon shijimi
 Mushroom – King Oyster
 Mushroom – Lobster
 Mushroom – Matsutake
 Mushroom – Truffle
 Nettles, Stinging
 Onions
Onion – Boiler
 Onion – Pearl

Papaya
 Parsley Root
 Parsnips
 Pear – Asian
 Pear – Bosc
 Pear – D’Anjou
 Pear – Forelles
 Pear – Seckels
Persimmons – Fuyu
 Persimmons – Hachiya
 Pineapple
Pomegranates
Potatoes – Fingerlings
 Potatoes – Purple
 Potatoes - Russet
Potatoes - Sweet
 Potatoes – Yukon
 Pumpkin
 Quince (ending)
Radishes
 Shallots
 Spinach – Bloomsdale
Squash – Hard (winter)
Starfruit (carambola)
Sweet Potatoes
 Tamarillos
 Tomatillos
 Turnips