

Menu Planning for December 2015

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 25th, Moon before Yule, Long Night or Cold Moon

National 'Hi Neighbor' Month

- December 4th - National Cookie Day
- December 7th – Pearl Harbor Day
- December 6th – Hanukkah begins
- December 14th – Hanukkah ends
- December 22nd – Winter Solstice

- 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 24th

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

- January 1st – New Year's Day
- January 3rd – Fruitcake Toss Day
- January 18th – 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 second 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	Citrus - Pummelo	Papaya
Apples, Late Season CA	Citrus – Satsumas	Parsley Root
Artichokes – large	Citrus – Tangerine	Parsnips
Asian Pears	Cranberries	Pear – Asian
Avocados	Cucumbers	Pear – Bosc
Beans – Cranberry	Endive	Pear – D’Anjou
Beans – Romano	Escarole	Pear – Forelles
Beets	Feijoa	Pear – Seckels
Broccoli	Fennel	Persimmons – Fuyu
Broccolini	Garlic	Persimmons – Hachiya
Broccoli Rabe	Greens – Chard	Pineapple
Brussels Sprouts	Greens – Collards	Pomegranates
Cabbage	Greens – Kale	Potatoes – Fingerlings
Cactus Leaves	Greens - Rapini	Potatoes – Purple
Cactus Pears	Horseradish	Potatoes - Russet
Cardoon (Cardoni)	Jicama	Potatoes - Sweet
Carrots (all colors)	Kiwifruit	Potatoes – Yukon
Cauliflower	Kohl Rabi (purple and green)	Pumpkin
Celery	Leeks	Quince (ending)
Celery Root	Mushroom – Black Trumpet	Radishes
Chayote Squash(Mirliton)	Mushroom – Chanterelle	Shallots
Chestnuts	Mushroom – Hedgehog	Spinach – Bloomsdale
Chicory	Mushroom – Hon shimiji	Squash – Hard (winter)
Chili Peppers	Mushroom – King Oyster	Starfruit (carambola)
Citrus - Grapefruit	Mushroom – Lobster	Sweet Potatoes
Citrus - Kumquats	Mushroom – Matsutake	Tamarillos
Citrus – Lemons	Mushroom – Truffle	Tomatillos
Citrus - Limes	Nettles, Stinging	Turnips
Citrus – Navel Oranges	Onions	
Citrus – Oroblanco	Onion – Boiler	
	Onion – Pearl	