



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 14th, Moon before Yule, Long
 Night or Cold Moon
 National 'Hi Neighbor' Month

- December 4th - National Cookie Day
- December 7th – Pearl Harbor Day
- December 21st – Winter Solstice
- December 24th – Hanukkah Begins

- 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 15th - Known as the 'Old Moon'
 or Moon after Yule

- January 1st – New Year's Day
- January 1st – Last day of Hanukkah
- January 3rd – Fruitcake Toss Day
- January 16th – Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday
- January 20th – Inauguration Day
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National Oatmeal Month
 National Soup Month

- January 28th – Chinese New Year starts – Year of the Rooster

**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 – usually around Christmas Day. The reason this fruit 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



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 December.

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

- 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