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Menu Planning for December 2018

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 3rd, Moon before Yule,

Long Night or Cold Moon

National 'Hi Neighbor' Month

- December 4th - National Cookie Day
- December 7th – Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- December 2nd – Hanukkah Begins
- December 10th – Hanukkah Ends

- December 21st – 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 21st - Known as the 'Old Moon' or Moon after Yule.

National Oatmeal Month

National Soup Month

- January 1st – New Year's Day
- January 11th – Fruitcake Toss Day
- January 21st – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

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.

Availability projections are based on annual history; sometimes weather patterns and other acts of the universe can change access to quality produce. The items noted in **BOLD** and underlined should be the best values for the month of December.

Planning for 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

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 shimiji
 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