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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 12th, Moon before Yule,

Long Night or Cold Moon

National 'Hi Neighbor' Month

- December 4th - National Cookie Day
- December 7th – Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- December 22nd – Hanukkah Begins
- December 30th – 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 10th - Known as the 'Old Moon' or Moon after Yule.

National Oatmeal Month

National Soup Month

- January 1st – New Year's Day
- January 20th – Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- January 11th – Fruitcake Toss 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