

Pears Grapes Eggplant Lima Beans

Seasonal Eating

September

THIS MONTH I USED THE FEATURED PRODUCE ON THESE DAYS:

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Pear Properties

Pears are a great source of fiber with 5 grams or 20% of the daily value per medium pear. They also provide about 10% of vitamin C. Store your unripe pears in a brown paper bag and Check the Neck for RipenessTM by applying gentle pressure on the neck of the pear with your thumb. When it yields it is ripe. You can now store them in the refrigerator up to five days.



D'Anjou

These pears are very sweet and juicy when ripe. D'Anjou pears are best when sliced fresh in salads or eaten out-of-hand as a snack.



Bartlett

These are best known as a good canning pear but are also enjoyed for their smooth texture in both cooked and fresh dishes.



Bosc

These pears are highly aromatic and flavorful. Their dense flesh makes them ideal for baking and cooking as they retain their shape and texture better.

Traditional Eggplant Dishes

Used extensively in middle eastern and Mediterranean cuisines, eggplant lends itself to a variety of flavorful dishes.

Baba Ghanoush (bah-bah gah-NOOSH): A puree of eggplant, tahini (sesame paste found in the olive section of the grocery store), olive oil, lemon juice and garlic. Often garnished with chopped mint leaves, pomegranate seeds or chopped pistachios, it is served as a spread or dip for pita bread chips.

Ratatouille (ra-tuh-TOO-ee): A popular dish from the French that combines eggplant, tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, zucchini, garlic and herbs—all simmered in olive oil. Can be served hot or cold as a side dish or on bread or crackers as an appetizer.

Caponata (kap-oh-NAH-tah): A Sicilian dish in Italy composed of eggplant, onions, tomatoes, anchovies, olives, pine nuts, capers and vinegar cooked together in olive oil and served at room temperature.

Parmigiana (pahr-muh-ZHAH-nuh): Eggplant slices dipped in egg and then breadcrumbs, grated Parmesan cheese and seasonings, sautéed and then topped with mozzarella cheese and tomato sauce. You can bake the slices for a healthier version.

Did You Know?

- The Concord grape is the only variety native to North America. All other varieties grown here were started from imported vines.
- Do not eat raw lima beans.
 They contain cyanogens, which releases a cyanide compound when the seed coat is opened. Don't worry; cooking deactivates this compound. The United States sets regulations to restrict commercially grown lima beans to those varieties with very low levels.

Fire Roasted Caponata

I medium eggplant

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided

3 cloves garlic

1/2 cup chopped red onions

3 stalks celery, chopped

I (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes, with juices

I envelope savory herb with garlic soup mix

3 tablespoons sugar

1/3 cup balsamic vinegar

1/2 cup capers, drained and chopped

1/2 cup green olives, drained and coarsely chopped

1/2 cup chopped fresh flat leaf parsley

I teaspoon black pepper

Salt to taste

Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Cut the eggplant in half lengthwise and drizzle I tablespoon of the olive oil over the cut surface. Place the eggplant cut side down on the foil. Scatter the garlic cloves around the eggplant and sprinkle the remaining I tablespoon oil over the garlic. Roast the eggplant at 400 degrees until it is tender, 20-25 minutes. When the eggplant is done, remove it from the oven and allow to cool enough to handle. Scoop out the inside of the eggplant and coarsely chop. Reserve the garlic cloves. In a 10 inch skillet, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat, add the onion and celery and cook, stirring until the vegetables begin to soften, about 3 minutes. Squeeze the garlic out of its skin, and add it with the tomatoes to the skillet. Cook, stirring, until the tomatoes begin to give off some of their juices, about 5 minutes. Add the soup mix, sugar and vinegar and cook an additional 3 minutes. Add the eggplant, capers, olives, parsley and pepper, stirring to blend. Remove the skillet from the heat, taste and season with salt and pepper, if necessary. Let cool to warm or room temperature. Will keep about I week in the refrigerator. Serve over grilled or baked chicken or fish or spread on toasted slices of Italian bread.

Crunchy Pear and Celery Salad

4 stalks celery cleaned and cut in half crosswise

2 tablespoons cider vinegar (pear or raspberry if you have it)

2 tablespoons honey

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 ripe pears, Bartlett or d'Anjou, diced

I cup white Cheddar cheese, finely chopped

1/2 cup toasted pecans, chopped

Freshly ground black pepper

6 large lettuce leaves

Soak celery in a bowl of ice water for 15 minutes. Drain and pat dry and cut into 1/2" pieces. In a large bowl whisk together the vinegar, honey and salt. Add pears and stir gently to coat. Add celery, cheese and pecans and stir to combine. Season with pepper. Place a scoop of salad on each lettuce leaf. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Chef's Notes: Eggplant

Eggplant comes in colors ranging from white to striped to dark purple and in sizes ranging from a golf ball to a football.

Choosing:

Look for a pretty green, velvety cap (calyx) Should squeak when two are rubbed together

Should be heavy for size and firm Japanese or Asian eggplant and Italian or Baby eggplant have more tender, sweet flesh and delicate skin

Folk wisdom used to say to look at the scar on the blossom end. If it is a dot then the eggplant is male and if it is a line then it is female. The males were more desirable because they had fewer seeds making them less bitter. Now the breeding has eliminated most of the seeds so this may not be as true today but you can try it.

Storing:

Eggplant becomes very bitter with age and is very perishable so try to use within a day of purchase or harvest. Store in a cool, dry place as they are very sensitive to cold damage and will develop indented, wrinkly spots in the refrigerator, but if storage for more than a day is needed, place in the vegetable bin of the refrigerator.

Preparing:

Older, larger eggplants have more seeds that contain a bitter liquid so to remove some of the bitterness or if you are going to fry the eggplant you may want to salt it. Slice the eggplant and sprinkle with kosher salt. Allow to sit 20-30 minutes until liquid begins to form on the surface. Rinse and pat dry. You may want to cut down on the salt used in the recipe if you salt your eggplant and the recipe doesn't take into consideration salting. Younger, smaller eggplants won't be as bitter but will still have moisture if you are going to fry them.

Eggplant is like a sponge so if you are going to fry it make sure you completely coat it in crumbs or batter to prevent it from soaking up the oil.