

Seasonal Eating
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Ginger Heats Up the Holidays
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The holidays are fast approaching and that means a flurry of cooking and baking and entertaining. Spices fill the air with comforting aromas and flavors that we especially associate with the holiday season – cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice and the king of all spices – ginger. This versatile, spicy and warming root is a seasonal favorite and deserves a starring role in your holiday cooking.

Ginger comes in several forms. It starts out as a fresh knobby root in the produce section of the grocery store. It has a light tan skin with a yellowish interior. The skin can be removed easily with just a metal spoon, scraped down the sides or with a paring knife. The flesh is quite fibrous, so it needs to be broken up if using in a dish (as opposed to steeping it in a liquid and straining it out). Usually, it is grated on the fine side of the grater. You can also mince it finely. The fresh ginger is pungent and spicy and has a great aroma. It is wonderful to use in a stir fry. Ginger and garlic are great friends. Just add both of these to the pan just for a minute or so before adding the sauce, so they don't burn. Fresh ginger is also good in marinades, sauces and dressings. It is quite strong so start out with a teaspoon to a tablespoon and build from there, if needed. It can be used raw or cooked. Wrapped tightly you can store it in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks or for longer storage, put it in the freezer for up to 6 months.

Candied or crystallized ginger is the fresh ginger, chopped and then cooked in a sugar syrup and coated with sugar. It has the spicy heat of the ginger combined with the sweetness of the sugar. You can make your own or purchase it in jars in the spice section. This adds great depth to cookies and baked goods. Try adding chopped crystallized ginger to your favorite recipes for spice cake, molasses cookies or pumpkin bread.

Dried ground ginger has many uses as well. It is not a good substitute for fresh ginger as the flavor is a little different but works very well in baked goods and sauces and vegetables. Ginger pairs well with other fall ingredients like squash, pumpkin, carrots, pears and sweet potatoes. Try adding some ground ginger to your favorite sweet potato recipe or mix honey and ginger with cooked carrots and roast for a few minutes to caramelize. You can enhance the ginger flavor in baked goods by using the ground ginger in the batter along with the chopped crystallized ginger.



Another form of ginger, popular for the holiday season, is ginger ale or ginger beer. The ginger beer can be alcoholic or non-alcoholic and has a stronger ginger flavor than the ale. Many holiday punch recipes call for ginger ale. For an easy punch, simply combine white grape juice and ginger ale for a sparkly non-alcoholic champagne substitute that will please young and old alike.

So heat up your holiday cooking over the next few months with a little added ginger. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Pumpkin Ginger Muffins

- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1/2 water (or ginger ale)
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup canned pumpkin (not pie filling)
- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 3/4 cups flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup crystallized ginger, chopped

In small bowl, combine cranberries and water (or ginger ale). In medium bowl, combine eggs, pumpkin, sugar and oil. Beat well. Stir in cranberries and water mixture. In large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon and crystallized ginger. Make a well in the center. Pour in pumpkin mixture, stirring just until moistened. Spoon into greased muffin tins or tins lined with cupcake papers, about 3/4 full. Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes.