BROCCOLI

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
Broccoli is a universal vegetable used in all types of cuisines throughout the world. Native to the Mediterranean, broccoli has been popular in Italy since Roman times. In fact, it gets its name from the Italian word for “cabbage sprout,” and when first introduced in England, broccoli was referred to as “Italian asparagus.” Today, broccoli is grown in temperate climates in many parts of the world, particularly in the cooler regions. Like its cousin, the cauliflower, it is made up of unopened flower heads, and it comes in a variety of colors, ranging from deep sage to dark green and purplish-green. Although commercial cultivation of broccoli dates back to the 1500s, it did not become popular in the United States until the early 1920s. It is available year-round, but its peak season is October through April. Packed with a hearty array of vitamins and minerals, broccoli is as nutritious as it is delicious.

Healthy ingredient contribution

**ANTIOXIDANTS:** Broccoli contains glucoraphanin, which the body processes into the anti-cancer compound sulforaphane. This compound rids the body of a bacteria believed to increase the risk of gastric cancer. Furthermore, broccoli contains a powerful antioxidant compound and anti-carcinogen found to hinder the growth of certain cancers while also boosting liver function.

**CALCIUM:** While the calcium content of one serving doesn’t equal that of a glass of milk, broccoli is a significant source of calcium. Calcium does more than build strong bones. Research shows that this mineral may play a role in the control of high blood pressure, and it may work to prevent colon cancer.

**FIBER:** Broccoli is also fiber-rich, which enhances the gastrointestinal (GI) tract as well as aims to reduce blood cholesterol levels. Not only is it a rich source, but half of its fiber is insoluble and half is soluble, helping to meet the need for both types of fiber.

**FOLIC ACID:** The folic acid in broccoli helps women sustain normal tissue growth and is often used as a supplement when taking birth control pills and during pregnancies.

**POTASSIUM:** Broccoli contains a high amount of potassium, which helps maintain a healthy nervous system and optimal brain function, as well as promotes regular muscle growth.

**VITAMIN A:** Used mostly as beta-carotene, the vitamin A in broccoli acts as an important antioxidant that has been linked to reduced risk of numerous conditions, including cataracts, heart disease and cancer.

**VITAMIN C:** Broccoli provides a high amount of vitamin C, which aids iron absorption in the body and prevents the development of cataracts and eases symptoms of the common cold.

**VITAMIN K:** Broccoli contains high levels vitamin K, which, along with calcium, helps with bone health and the prevention of osteoporosis.

Varieties and uses

- **Broccolini:** Broccolini is the trademarked name for a cross between broccoli and Chinese broccoli. It is a smaller version of sprouting broccoli only with thinner, delicate stems and smaller florets—thus, the name broccolini (baby broccoli). The flavor is sweet with a subtle, peppery taste. Generally, it is used as a garnish on dishes but can be used in salads and soups.

- **Broccoli rabe:** More leafy than regular broccoli, broccoli rabe is the least sweet of the broccoli types and has a slightly bitter, zesty bite. It’s good for frying, steaming and braising and can be used in soups and salads.

- **Chinese Broccoli:** Also called Chinese kale, this broccoli sometimes has small white flowers. The stalk, thick leaf and buds can be eaten, traditionally in stir-fries.

- **Purple Sprouting Broccoli:** The purple variety is the oldest kind of broccoli and is considered the ancestor of all broccoli varieties. It was the most widely used cultivar throughout Europe before the green broccoli came along. Used in stir-fry to make it more colorful, as well as health uses. The spears have a chewy texture and full-bodied flavor. In Italy, it is served the same way as asparagus.

- **Romanesco:** Admired for its intriguing spiral flower heads, Romanesco looks more like a cauliflower but tastes like a broccoli. It has these characteristics because it’s a cross between a broccoli and a cauliflower. It’s also the reason it is sometimes called “broccoflower.” It has a nutty, slightly sweet taste, and a soft, creamy texture.

- **Sprouting Broccoli:** This variety is the one most people are familiar with. Sprouting broccoli is characterized by small stems sprouting out from the main stem with green clusters on top.
Storage
Store fresh broccoli in an airtight bag in the refrigerator for up to four days.

Serving size
One cup chopped, cooked broccoli: 55 calories, 5 grams of fiber, 4 grams of protein, 0.6 grams of fat (0 saturated), no cholesterol, 168% DV of vitamin C and 48% DV of vitamin A.

Kevin Freebern contributed to this article. The following recipe was created and tested by Clemson University’s Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.

CHIPOTLE CASHEW CHICKEN AND BROCCOLI STIR-FRY

Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients:
- ¼ cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons Agave nectar
- 2 tablespoons minced chipotle chile canned in adobo sauce
- 2 tablespoons freshly chopped cilantro
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 (14-ounce) package stir-fry rice noodles
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut in ½-inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 bunches baby broccoli, trimmed
- 1 green bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- ½ sweet onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup raw cashews, toasted and chopped
- 1 (14-ounce) package stir-fry rice noodles
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut in ½-inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 bunches baby broccoli, trimmed
- 1 green bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- ½ sweet onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup raw cashews, toasted and chopped

1) Combine chicken broth with next 6 ingredients (through cornstarch) in small mixing bowl; set aside.

2) Bring medium pot of water to a boil. Remove from heat. Immerse rice noodles in hot water; let stand 8 - 10 minutes or until noodles are soft but firm. Drain; rinse with cold water.

3) Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper, add to pan; cook 4 minutes or until browned. Add garlic, broccoli, bell pepper, carrot and onion; cook 3 minutes or until vegetables are softened. Add chipotle mixture and noodles; let simmer for 2 minutes. Top with cashews; serve immediately.