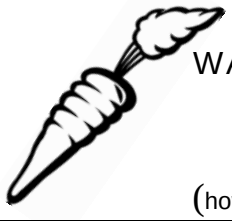
OCTOBER – Featured Vegetable: CARROT



WASH. EAT.

(how easy is that?)

The carrot plant is a member of the parsley family, characterized by light, feathery leaves. Other members of this family include fennel, dill, and celery. The edible root of the plant is usually orange and shaped like a long cylindrical cone.

Facts

Carrots grow in a host of other colors including white, yellow, or red. The carrot is a plant with a thick, fleshy, deeply colored root, which grows underground, and feathery green leaves that emerge above ground. Carrot roots have a crunchy texture and a sweet and minty aromatic taste, while the greens are fresh tasting and slightly bitter.

Most of us refer to carrots as the vegetable that is good for our eyes. This is because carrots are a good source of vitamin A that is very important for healthy eyesight, skin, growth, and helps our body resist infection. According to a study conducted by researchers of the USDA, eating carrots may lower cholesterol levels. Carrots are also a great source of beta carotene. In fact, carrots contain a group of plant pigments called carotenoids, and beta carotene is a member of this group. These plant pigments were first identified in carrots and therefore their name was derived from the word carrot. Beta carotene is linked to reducing chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

Carrots have higher natural sugar content than all other vegetables with the exception of beets. This is why they make a wonderful snack when eaten raw and make a tasty addition to a variety of cooked dishes.

History

Carrots originated in Asia, near Afghanistan. At that time, carrots were shades of purple! In the 16th century, orange carrots were developed in Holland in honor of William I of Orange. The orange-colored carrots were shipped from Europe to the early American settlers.

Sources:
Encyclopedia of Foods: A Guide to Healthy Nutrition. Dole Food Company: 2002.
5 A Day, Fruit and Vegetable of the Month: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5ADay/month/index.htm

Where Grown

California produces about 60 percent of the United States crop, 25 percent of which goes into the production of mini-peeled carrots.

Types

There are many varieties of carrots. Carrots can be as small as two inches or as long as three feet, ranging in diameter from one-half of an inch to over 2 inches. Carrots are usually sold packaged in plastic bags. Baby carrots were once longer carrots that have been peeled, trimmed to 2 inches or smaller in length and packaged. True baby carrots are removed from the ground early and actually look like miniature carrots.

Nutrients

- High in vitamin A (carotenes)
- Good source of fiber
- Contains phytochemicals (plant compounds) that may help prevent cancer and heart disease.

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Encyclopedia of Foods: A Guide to Healthy Nutrition. Dole Food Company: 2002.

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