



The Healing Pantry

The Harvest may be waning, but these pantry staples can keep you on the road to good health all fall long.

by Cal Orey | Posted October 2007

Not just for salad or a dash of flavor, items like nutrient-dense vinegars, oils, herbs and spices are also rich in antioxidants and other healing properties. Check out these 20 healthful, slim-down foods to heal body, mind and spirit.

VINEGARS

Apple Cider Vinegar: In the era of the Romans and Egyptians, there were many potent vinegars on meal tables. Today, we know apple cider vinegar, especially the natural and organic kind, is high in fiber and rich in potassium, which can help detoxify the body, according to Manhattan-based chiropractor and clinical nutritionist Barry Goldstein. Apple cider vinegar can balance sodium and potassium levels, which can also aid in weight loss. Pairing its total ingredients, including boron, calcium and enzymes, with nutritious fall fruits and vegetables may help prevent cancer, heart disease and bone loss.

Balsamic Vinegar: In the 17th century, people used it as a gargle, tonic and air purifier against the plague. The word balsamico means balm in Italian, which connotes a healing, soothing medicine. Balsamic vinegar, like its grape-filled counterpart, red wine vinegar, contains powerful polyphenols (compounds that act like disease-fighting antioxidants), according to Leroy Creasy, Ph.D., emeritus professor of fruit and vegetable science at Cornell University College of Agriculture in Ithaca, N.Y. Holistic doctors like Allan Magaziner, D.O., founder and director of the Magaziner Center for Wellness and Anti-Aging Medicine in Cherry Hill, N.J., agrees. He says red wine vinegar may have some disease-fighting antioxidant vitamins that are not listed on its label—and yet can be beneficial to our health and well-being. Antioxidants are believed to prevent cancer and protect against heart disease.

Fruit Vinegars: In Japan, vinegar drinks, in particular those made from vitamin-rich fruit, are all the rage. A Korean delight, persimmon vinegar, is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, which are also good for bolstering the immune system to fight off colds and flu in the fall. While it isn't easily found in the United States, it may be found at Korean supermarkets. For a delightful kick, splash one or two tablespoons per serving on top of grapefruit and oranges.

Red Wine Vinegar: According to the Four Thieves legend from the Black Plague, these robbers in Marseilles bargained and exchanged a famous vinegar-based formula for freedom from prison, explaining that they washed themselves with the infection-fighting liquid every few hours. Nowadays, researchers claim red wine vinegar may have a new class of nutrients. UC Davis-California wine chemist Andrew Waterhouse, Ph.D., theorizes that red wine vinegar, like red wine, does contain antioxidants. "The phenols that are in the grapes are probably the best for you."

OILS

Evening Primrose Oil: The evening primrose, a plant with bright yellow flowers, is found in dry meadows from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains. It blooms only in the evening, then dies, leaving seed pods that can be used for their healing oil. "Evening primrose oil contains an omega-6 essential fatty acid, gamma-linolenic acid. Some research has found that because of EPO's potential inflammatory effects it may be helpful for arthritis," explains Keri M. Gans, R.D., an American Dietetic Association spokeswoman from New York City.

Fish Oil: Native people in Alaska and Greenland eat fish oil as a staple in their fatty-fish-based diet. "Fish oil is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which the body cannot produce. Research on omega-3s from fish oils have revealed it to have anti-inflammatory and other effects that could improve cardiovascular health and help lower triglycerides," says Gans.

Flaxseed Oil: Since antiquity flaxseed oil has been noted in folk medicine to help stomach problems, colic and hemorrhoids. The seeds are believed by alternative healers to treat coughs, colds, respiratory infections and urinary tract infections. And there's more. "Flaxseed oil is considered one of the richest food sources of alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid, and is thought to have beneficial cardiovascular effects," explains Gans. Plus, this healing oil can be added to cooked casseroles and soups.

Olive Oil: The olive tree was first cultivated in the Mediterranean countries 6,000 years ago. Since then, olive oil has played a therapeutic role in the diet and provides amazing healing powers, from preventing diabetes to keeping off unwanted pounds, especially when combined with vinegars. Olive oil, which is 74 percent heart-healthy monounsaturated fat, contains plenty of healthful nutrients such as antioxidants, vitamins A, C and E, along with phytoestrogens and sterols. Olive oil (extra virgin is recommended) is good for the digestive system, helps regularity, lowers cholesterol levels and guards against cancer.

HERBS, SPICES AND TEAS

Chamomile: For more than 2,000 years, chamomile, a daisylike plant, has been considered a medicinal miracle. It was known as "ground apple" by the Greeks because of its fragrant scent. Chamomile tea (spiked with apple cider vinegar and cinnamon) can be calming. "Several chemicals in chamomile, particularly apigenin, are known to influence receptors in the brain that induce relaxation, says Southern California's Ray Sahelian, M.D., who touts drinking herbal teas to prevent colds and flu in *Doctors' Orders: What 101 Doctors Do to Stay Healthy* (Kensington, with Cal Orey).

Cinnamon: Millenia ago, Egyptians used Chinese cinnamon in funeral rites, a tradition later carried on by Egypt's Roman conquerors. The popular and valued spice was used for both embalming and for preserving meats. According to Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D., of Woodmere, cinnamon may help reduce blood sugar levels and help control diabetes. Perhaps it's a healthy culinary instinct that has led bakers to use cinnamon in sweet concoctions from drinks to baked goods.

Garlic: For at least 3,000 years, garlic, dubbed "the stinking rose," has been used medicinally. The therapeutic uses of garlic have been noted in more than 1,000 scientific studies. Garlic has been found to lower cholesterol and high blood pressure, and may ward off infections and cancer via the antioxidant mineral selenium. It also contains allicin, which is a strong antimicrobial, so eating garlic may help protect against colds, flu and bronchitis.

Ginger: Four thousand years ago ancient Greeks knew ginger root to be a soothing medicine for the stomach and intestines, relieving cramps and nausea. So, if you are going on a long, leaf-viewing drive this autumn, ginger may be your secret weapon against carsickness. A soothing mug of ginger stored in a travel thermos may help prevent motion sickness.

Onions: Hippocrates prescribed onions as wound healers and pneumonia fighters. "Yellow and red onions contain powerful antioxidants and an anti-inflammatory agent called quercetin, which may provide relief for sufferers of hay fever and asthma. The sulfur compound in onions lessens swelling, redness and allergic reactions," notes Taub-Dix.

Rose Hips: An important staple in the diets of Native American tribes because of their incredible health benefits, rose hips are a good source of antioxidants, including vitamins C, E and beta-carotene, which can help boost immunity and provide relief for cold and cough symptoms common during the fall months.

Tumeric: This bright yellow spice originating in India contains a phytochemical called curcumin that helps lessen inflammation, which can help relieve aching joints in colder weather. "Tumeric may also support healthy liver function and promote a protective response to environmental stresses," says Barry Goldstein. You can incorporate it into your own diet by using it to spice up lentils or a vegetarian dish.

Cal Orey is author of A Complete Guide to Nature's Most Remarkable Remedy and The Healing Powers of Olive Oil: A Complete Guide to Nature's Liquid Gold (February 2008, Kensington) Learn more at www.calorey.com

AWESOME AUTUMN EDIBLES

These five versatile foods mix well with vinegars, oils, warming herbs, spices and tasty teas for healthful fall recipes.

Apples: This fruit is a rich source of pectin, a water-soluble fiber that may help lower the risk of heart disease. "The fall is a good time to protect your heart in preparation for snow shoveling in the winter," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, an American Dietetic Association spokeswoman in Woodmere. A bonus: One medium apple has no fat and a mere 81 calories.

Pumpkin: Welcome to a good source of beta-carotene, potassium, vitamins A, C, and dietary fiber, notes Manhattan chiropractor and clinical nutritionist Barry Goldstein. Also, pumpkin seed oil, like flaxseed oil, contains omega-6 fatty acid and is delicious over fruits, vegetables and salads.

Spinach: A single serving of cooked spinach provides beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin. Studies show that these carotenes protect the arteries from bad cholesterol and can heal your heart, according to Liz Applegate, Ph.D. author of 101 Miracle Foods That Heal Your Heart (Prentice Hall Press). It's the perfect fall food addition to a lasagna chock-full of whole grain pasta, onions, garlic and tomatoes.

Tomatoes: Scoop up the end-of-season tomatoes while you can—these gems are rich in the antioxidant lycopene, and may lower the risk of developing cancers by preventing damage caused by harmful, cancer-contributing molecules called free radicals. One cup of chopped tomatoes has just 35 calories. Because of this, tomatoes are a fat-free and versatile filler in many low-cal meals such as casseroles and soups.

Turkey: "Turkey doesn't just have to be for Thanksgiving," says New York City nutrition consultant Keri M.Gans. Turkey, like garlic, is a good source of the mineral selenium, which clinical studies have found to be cancer-fighting, she adds. "White meat turkey without skin is an excellent source of protein and is naturally low in fat, containing only one gram per ounce," concludes Gans.

- **Italian Style-Marinated Tomatoes**

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