

Spring into a food adventure

By: Lois A. Ahrens

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Spring is a time of growth and rejuvenation. It can offer a great time to extend that fresh start to the foods we eat and serve our family. Consider these possibilities to breathe new life into routine food habits and meal plans.

Eat Green: The most tell-tale mark of spring is the color green, and it is evident in an abundance of fresh, succulent vegetables. Incorporating tender asparagus spears, green (spring) onions, baby green peas or fresh broccoli into family meal plans can add that “fresh from the garden” taste while providing a rich assortment of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Tossing a mixture of greens such as fresh spinach, leafy green lettuce, romaine, arugula and Swiss chard into a salad bowl, topping it with radish slices to add a mild peppery flavor and your favorite low-fat dressing creates an effortless side dish that adds texture and flavor to a routine meal.

Although it is not green, nothing trumpets the arrival of spring like rhubarb. Adding a sweet fruit such as strawberries with this tart vegetable in a recipe for muffins, cobbler or fruit crisp can add a new dimension to familiar stand-bys.

Live Lighter: As we welcome sunlight and warmth, we are enticed to spend more time outside. Consider shedding heavy winter food choices for light, vibrant foods that need minimal preparation or are eaten raw. Fruits fit naturally with this time of year. Spring fruits such as apricots, strawberries, mango and pineapple are just some of the options that can offer a refreshing ready-to-eat menu choice.

Embrace Adventure: Just as spring begins its natural cycle in nature, this season of renewal might be the time to re-think family food habits. New food choices can be an invigorating adventure. Foods that family members may not have enjoyed in the past may appeal to them now.

For very young children, all foods are new. Research shows children generally need to be offered a food 8 to 10 times -- or even more -- before they start to eat and enjoy it. The key to a positive food experience is offering without forcing even one bite. Planning meals to include a wide variety of nutritious foods enables children to expand their eating experiences in their own time.

Meanwhile, invite children to participate in the adventure of grocery shopping, choose a new food and help with preparation. This can stimulate conversation about the new food. Encourage them to describe the color, shape, feel and smell. Let them use their imagination to

give the food a catchy new name. “Cool names can make for cool foods,” says Brian Wansink, food researcher at Cornell University. “Whether it be ‘power peas,’ ‘x-ray vision carrots’ or ‘dinosaur broccoli trees,’ giving a food a fun name makes kids think it will be more fun to eat.”

Springtime is a time to awaken from winter hibernation and old routines, a time to enjoy new connections with the foods around us. Go ahead -- spring into action and get ready for new beginnings, great food, and a whole lot of fun!

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