

healthy dish

## Veggie surprise!

# Pro chef tips to optimizing nutrients *and* flavor

Talk about letting a good thing go to waste: Up to 62 percent of the vitamins, minerals and antioxidants in vegetables are leached by moisture and heat during cooking, depriving us of their energizing and beautifying benefits. Here, the tips top chefs use to ensure the most nutrients per bite.



**Chef Jori Morgan,** author, *Gorgeous* (Cumberland House, 2007)

### Don't bother thawing frozen veggies



**Chef's tip:** "Many cooks thaw frozen vegetables before cooking. But this lets water-soluble nutrients like vitamins B and C wash away with the melting ice. Instead, save time and nutrients—plus get fresher flavor—by not thawing veggies at all before cooking."

**Success secret:** Frozen vegetables are blanched before packaging, so they cook faster than fresh produce. Two minutes in boiling water cooks most frozen veggies.



**Chef Michael Nenes,** assistant vice president of culinary arts, The Art Institutes

### Cut fresh produce into *big* chunks

**Chef's tip:** "When prepping fresh vegetables for steaming, cooks often cut them into small pieces. But the extra surface area lets more water-soluble vitamins leach away through moisture. I keep more nutrients in the dish—and save precious time—by cutting fresh produce into large chunks. As an added benefit, the same-size veggies cook evenly in less time."

**Success secret:** To maximize nutrients, the ideal chunk size is 2 inches cubed or bigger. Or steam a vegetable whole and slice it afterward.

### Reintroduce lost nutrients with juice



**Chef's tip:** "It's easy to lose track of time in the kitchen and end up overcooking vegetables, causing nutrients to leach out. To safeguard against this, juice a small amount of extra uncooked veggies. Then pour the juice over the finished dish as a light glaze."

**Success secret:** If you don't have a juicer, liquefy the small portion of vegetables in a blender, then strain out the liquid for the glaze.



**Chef Adrienne Calvo,** author, *Maximum Flavor* (Xlibris Corporation, 2005)

### Peel veggies *after* you cook



**Chef's tip:** "Though more nutritious, unpeeled vegetables can make a dish look unattractive. To get the best of both worlds, peel veggies *after* cooking. Half of the skin's nutrients will seep into the veggies. Plus, they will be easier to peel."

**Success secret:** If a veggie is too hot to handle, use a fork to hold it steady on a hard surface, then peel.



**Chef Robert Sundell,** Redondo Beach, CA

### But...aren't raw veggies more nutritious?

It's a toss up: Raw vegetables provide nutrients that would otherwise be reduced by heat or moisture. And in their natural state, veggies are rich in digestive enzymes that enhance the gut's ability to break down food and absorb nutrients. But on the flip side, heat converts many antioxidants (including the *lycopene* in tomatoes and the *beta-carotene* in corn and carrots) into forms that are more bioavailable, which means they are better absorbed by the body and provide a greater health benefit.

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