



8 Fantastic Foods for 2008

Diversify your plate and beat menu boredom with these nutrition superstars


As the new year unfolds, I'd like to highlight some nutritious foods that I recommend adding to your diet if you haven't done so already. Expanding your food repertoire with a varied menu offers the best chance of getting the widest range of protective phytonutrients through diet and all the nutrients you need.


In the coming months, I also encourage you to make a habit of selecting slow-digesting carbohydrates over ones that are highly processed to help prevent a rapid rise in blood sugar, head off insulin resistance, and minimize weight gain. I predict that science will continue to discover that carbohydrate choices have a powerful effect on your waistline and overall well-being. In the meantime, here are eight great foods—some of my personal favorites—to taste in 2008.

**1 | HEMP SEEDS** Hemp comes from the same plant (*Cannabis sativa*) as marijuana, but lacks its intoxicating properties. The seeds do have an impressive fatty acid profile, providing alpha-linolenic acid (an omega-3) as well as stearadonic acid, currently studied by scientists because it's efficiently used by the body to produce EPA, an omega-3 found in fish. I enjoy hemp seeds lightly toasted: Place them in a dry skillet over medium-high heat, stir until they pop and turn light brown, and then season to taste. (I add a sprinkle of soy sauce, red pepper, and garlic powder.)

**2 | DRIED BERRIES** I snack on these delicious fruits often. Because they don't need refrigeration, blueberries and other dried berries are a convenient antioxidant source. I plan to try recipes with goji berries, a relatively new and exotic source of beneficial plant compounds.


**3 | DULSE** I acquired a taste for sea vegetables when I first traveled to Japan as a teenager, and they remain in my diet for their abundance of nutrients, including calcium, potassium, magnesium, and the trace elements iodine and zinc. Dulse (which rhymes with *pulse*) is one of the easiest varieties to try. Its chewy texture and mildly salty flavor make it good for snacking, right out of the bag. It also works well in soups and salads. You'll find it in the Asian section of natural-food stores.

**4 | HAZELNUTS** I believe these nuts, also called filberts, are too often overlooked. They contain more folate and antioxidant proanthocyanidins than any other tree nut. And like other nuts, they provide vitamin E and monounsaturated fats, making them heart-healthy choices. Add them to salads and rice dishes, or enjoy them on their own as a snack.

**5 | ADZUKI BEANS** Popular in many Asian cuisines, these small red beans, also called aduki or azuki, have a sweet, nutty flavor. They cook quickly, offer a high dose of protein, and contain easily digestible sugars that won't cause gas and bloating. I use them in many dishes, including my vegetarian chili. Find them at natural-food stores and Asian markets.

**6 | FARRO** This hearty whole grain, a type of wheat from antiquity, hails from ancient Mesopotamia and can replace rice in pilafs and risottos. A standout source of fiber, vitamin E, and magnesium, it's also low in gluten and digests slowly.

**7 | FRESH SARDINES** Watch for sardines at the local fish counter. I've noticed in my travels that fresh varieties are increasingly available throughout the United States. They provide omega-3 fats, and as small, vegetarian fish, they contain fewer contaminants than bigger fish. I enjoy sardines prepared simply: brushed with olive oil, sprinkled with salt, and then grilled and served with lemon. Fresh sardines taste much better than canned ones.

**8 | PARSNIPS** These root vegetables are also underappreciated, probably because most people haven't eaten parsnips prepared properly. When done right (I eat them roasted), parsnips have a sweet, earthy flavor. Root vegetables offer an array of nutrients, and their low glycemic load prevents spikes in blood sugar. I often prepare parsnips with other roots, such as rutabagas and carrots. Toss bite-size pieces with olive oil, season with fresh herbs to taste, and roast at 400 degrees until tender and browned.

Old Friends in New Colors

Boost your nutrient range by enjoying favorite fruits and vegetables in alternative hues: purple potatoes, white eggplants, yellow raspberries. These are generally heirloom varieties or developed by cross-breeding, not genetic modification. Orange cauliflower is one of my favorites; it has a high carotenoid content (25 times higher than white) and good flavor. In fact, I think these varieties sometimes taste better than the ones with familiar tints.