

Pulses

A pulse is an edible seed that grows in a pod. Foods such as haricot beans, lentils, kidney beans, chick peas and butter beans are pulses. Pulses count as vegetables in the five-a-day scheme but only one portion, however much you eat!

Pulses are extremely good for children because they are a great source of protein, fibre, folate and minerals such as iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium and phosphorus as well as trace minerals. Some pulses also provide a variety of vitamins. As an added bonus they are often popular - particularly baked beans on toast.

Raspberries

Raspberries are thought to originate from Asia but grew so well in Scotland that, in the 1950s, raspberries were taken on a train, known as the Raspberry Special, from Scotland to Covent Garden in London.

Raspberries are rich in vitamin C and also provide folate. They contain other potent antioxidant phytochemicals and fibre.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb is commonly mistaken for a fruit but is actually a close relative of garden sorrel and is a member of the vegetable family. It was initially cultivated for its medicinal qualities and it was not until the 18th century that rhubarb was grown for culinary purposes in Britain and America.

Rhubarb contains some vitamin C and fibre. It provides minerals such as potassium and calcium.

Squashes

The term 'squash' refers to edible gourds, including courgettes, marrow, pumpkins, butternut squash, acorn squash and all the other kinds now making their appearance in supermarkets in the autumn. The squashes are native to America, North and South. Though explorers brought seeds back to Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, squash didn't stir up any interest until the 19th century. One Frenchman, after tasting 'the new vegetable' for the first time, negatively referred to squash as "Naples' and Spain's revenge."

Squashes have the advantage of being colourful, a touch exotic. They often combine well with appealing, sweet ingredients. Squashes have a high water

content, some fibre and vitamin C and the coloured flesh contains carotenoids, which are converted to vitamin A.

Strawberries

Like raspberries, strawberries are members of the rose family. They are unusual among fruits as they have their seeds on the outside. They were cultivated by the Romans who believed they could cure a number of illnesses.

Strawberries are rich in vitamin C and provide some folate. They contain potent antioxidants like other berries.

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are a native American plant that was the main source of nourishment for early homesteaders and for soldiers during the War of Independence. They are rich in vitamin A and also provide vitamin C. They contain minerals such as potassium, manganese and magnesium as well as fibre. One colonial physician called them the "vegetable indispensable".

Sweet potatoes are often confused with yams but yams are large, starchy roots grown in Africa and Asia which don't count in the five-a-day quota. Nor are sweet potatoes related to ordinary potatoes, except that both are tubers (i.e. root vegetables).

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are strictly speaking fruit, but we tend to think of them as vegetables. Tomatoes contain lycopene which is a potent antioxidant. They provide vitamins A, C and E and also minerals such as potassium. Today China is the largest tomato producer in the world.



Peppers

- Use as an extra topping on pizza.
- Great served sliced with a dip.
- A good way to use up ageing peppers is a cheap and cheerful variant of Spanish omelette. Chop the peppers into small pieces and fry them with onion, and at the last minute add peas. Pour on the omelette mixture. When the bottom is firm, sprinkle on some grated cheese and grill the top of the omelette until it too is firm.
- Serve as a topping on a mixed salad. Warm or cold salads made with strips of baked, roasted or grilled peppers are also delicious in the spring and summer.

Pineapple

- To test if ripe, a leaf should pull away easily from the fruit. In the shop, where you can't really do that, smell the end.
- Cheese cubes and pineapple chunks on cocktail sticks are an old favourite.
- Freeze pineapple juice in an ice cube container to make delicious cubes to suck on summer days.
- Use pineapple as a pizza topping.
- Peel, core and cut a pineapple into thick slices. Slow roast (gas mark 3 / 170°C) for 2-3 hours in water, caster sugar and a vanilla pod, occasionally basting. Top up water as necessary. Irresistible results!

Pulses

- You can add cooked kidney beans to a pie or mincemeat sauce.
- Serve tinned pulses like kidney beans cold, with or without dressing, as a salad accompaniment.
- Some children prefer baked beans cold.
- Add pulses to soups, casseroles and sauces. There are many pulse-based casseroles.
- Whizz up some hummus as an after-school snack See page 26.

Rhubarb

- The trick with rhubarb is to add plenty of sugar, so that it is sufficiently sweet.
- Choose the thinner, paler stems which are sweeter.
- Pureed rhubarb can be used to accompany oily fish such as mackerel and salmon.
- See our basic crumble mixture on page 27 and make rhubarb crumble.

Strawberries

- After cutting the tops off the strawberries, leave them at room temperature - they have far more taste than straight out of the fridge.
- Sprinkle them with a small amount of icing sugar and toss - when you are ready to eat them they will have a glossy finish.

- Strawberries are perfect for dipping in melted chocolate and allowing to set. Try some in white chocolate and others in dark and milk chocolate.
- Sliced strawberries lightly dusted in sugar then gently fried in unsalted butter are delicious too, served with ice cream or as a filling for pancakes.
- Try making strawberry ice cream. Purée 450g strawberries and beat in 300ml of double cream until quite thick. Sweeten to taste with icing sugar, stir and freeze (if the fruit is acidic, you may need to stir the mixture as it sets, to prevent it separating).
- Purée some strawberries with caster sugar to taste and the juice of half a lemon for a scrumptious strawberry sauce - good for leftover strawberries, and it freezes well too!

Sweet Potato

- They can be microwaved, steamed, baked or boiled and then mashed, to make a comforting food in cold weather, with butter melted over them.
- They can be mashed with crème fraîche and chives.
- They make a good ingredient in root vegetable casseroles.
- Cook sweet potatoes with apples - a winning combination. Peel and thinly slice the sweet potatoes. Peel, core and thinly slice the apples. Butter a casserole dish and place in it alternate layers of potatoes and apples, starting and finishing with potatoes. After each layer, sprinkle over sugar, salt, a pinch of nutmeg, lemon juice and dot with butter. Bake at the bottom of a medium hot oven for about 40 minutes, until soft. Serve straight from the casserole, bubbling in caramelised juices.

Tomatoes

- Buy or grow little cherry tomatoes or miniature plum tomatoes which children can pop whole into their mouths. Useful for lunchboxes.
- Tinned tomatoes can make a perfectly adequate substitute in many cooked recipes.
- Add sunblush or sun-dried tomatoes to salads.
- Tomatoes go well with cheese, either mozzarella or almost any other cheese, including cheddar. Serve alternate tomato and mozzarella slices, drizzled with olive oil and a few blobs of pesto, with chunky slices of bread.
- Try sliced tomatoes on toast, muffins or crumpets dotted with olive oil and grilled for a couple of minutes.
- Sliced tomatoes at room temperature drizzled with olive oil and left on the table tend to disappear!



Malaysian Banana Pancakes

This recipe has never yet failed us. Even older children who turn their noses up at bananas, love this. You can make it with other fruit too. Stewed apple chunks make a good substitute for mashed banana if you want to ring the changes.

Ingredients

Serves 4

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon sugar

125g self-raising flour

4-5 bananas, mashed

Oil or butter for frying

Beat eggs with sugar. Sift flour and fold into egg, a little at a time. Add mashed bananas and mix well. Now melt oil/butter in a frying pan and when hot, spoon in mixture with a teaspoon, to make individual pancakes. Alternatively, you can empty all the mixture into the pan and cook one large pancake for cutting up. Cook until lightly browned, then turn and cook other side. Delicious hot or cold.

Carrot and Orange Soup

Soups are a fantastic way to increase your child's veg and fruit intake. This recipe is a great favourite, with a sweet flavour:

Ingredients

Serves 6

25g butter

1tbsp olive oil

900g carrots, chopped

900g onion, chopped

1.5 litres vegetable stock

Zest and juice of 1 orange

Heat the butter and oil in a saucepan. Sauté the chopped carrots and onion for 10 mins. Add the stock and bring to the boil. Cover and simmer for 35 mins. Stir in the zest and orange juice. Season with salt and pepper if necessary. Blend in a liquidiser. Return to the saucepan and heat through. You can garnish this with chopped parsley or coriander and stir in a little crème fraîche or double cream. Delicious with croutons (see below).

Croutons

4-6 slices of bread with crusts removed

oil for frying

Optional: one clove garlic / good squirt of garlic puree