Add more color to your plate!

We hear a lot about phytonutrients these days, those natural chemical compounds that plants create to thrive despite competition, predators and pathogens. When we eat the plants, the phytonutrients help us maintain our health and eating a broad diversity of fruits, vegetables and herbs should give us a full spectrum of these important compounds.

Unfortunately, many of these beneficial phytonutrients have a bitter or astringent taste that most humans find less palatable than sweet, savory or fatty. Ever since farming began about 10,000 years ago, farmers have selected against bitter plants in favor of ones higher in sugar, starch and oil. Sugar, carbs and fats provided lots of fuel for doing the work of civilization-building, but generally today's crops have fewer phytonutrients for fighting human diseases than their bitter-tasting ancestors.

In her 2014 book *Eating on the Wild Side: The Missing Link to Optimum Health*, investigative reporter Jo Robinson writes “Wild dandelions, once a springtime treat for Native Americans, have seven times more phytonutrients than spinach, which we consider a ‘superfood.’ A purple potato native to Peru has 28 times more cancer-fighting anthocyanins than common Russet potatoes. One species of apple has a staggering 100 times more phytonutrients than the Golden Delicious displayed in our supermarkets.”

Industrial agriculture, of course, took things to an unprecedented level. The perfect example is sweet corn that we have morphed into SUPERSWEET corn. Our problem is that we think we’re eating a vegetable, so we’re being healthy, right? Not as much as we thought.

So what can we do? Look for bright color in your produce. Color is a good indication of higher phytonutrient content. Get veggies that are closer to their wild cousins, like arugula, dandelion greens and scallions. Eat the green parts of onions, scallions and leeks. That’s where the phytonutrients are living. Herbs have been basically left alone because we have sought them out for their original flavors. Enjoy lots of herbs like parsley, cilantro, and basil in your meals. And yes, eat a broad diversity of produce to get a full range of phytonutrients.

We hear “Eat your vegetables!” from everyone from Mom to the U.S. government. But we need more than that. We need to eat the produce that is nutrient-dense for optimum health.

Full *New York Times* article by Jo Robinson.
Tomatoes are also high in fiber, potassium, and choline, for heart health. An increase in potassium intake along with a decrease in sodium intake can be one of the most important dietary changes that the average person can make to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease.

Tomatoes are also delicious, especially if they are vine-ripened. We are so accustomed to having tomatoes whenever we want them, but that sweet, tangy, juicy bomb of flavor can only happen when tomatoes are eaten in season, not shipped green from Latin America or China in the winter, and chemically forced to change color to red. Those are some kind of pathetic cardboard imitation. Real vine-ripened tomatoes are worth waiting for, and heirlooms, the wild children of the tomato world, come in fantastic shapes and colors that have a true tomato flavor that rivals any hybrid.

**How to use your tomatoes**

- Put in a salad
- Put on a pizza
- Cut in half down the equator, top with seasoned breadcrumbs, then broil
- Add to soups and stews
- Braise or sauté with fish or chicken, Italian seasoning, olives and capers
- Slice thick and slow roast (225°F for 2 hours)
- Use cherry tomatoes for kebabs
- Stuff tomatoes with ground beef or pork, bacon, rice, spinach, or cracked wheat
- Combine fresh tomato puree, mint, sugar, champagne and fresh lemon juice for a refreshing sorbet
- Add zip to tuna salad by adding tomatoes, green onions and a touch of chopped fresh basil
- Green and yellow tomatoes make great toppers for eggs and enchiladas.

From *Bounty from the Box, the CSA Farm Cookbook* by Mi Ae Lipe.