

What You Should Know About Broccoli

Broccoli comes from the Latin word "brachium" meaning "branch" or "arm." It has been around and grown by Americans in their gardens for more than 200 years. It is a green, fleshy stemmed food plant with a flowering head first grown in the Italian province of Calabria and was locally known as Calabrese. The first commercially grown broccoli was harvested in New York. The variety of broccoli popularly grown in Europe is different from that grown in North America. The "green sprouting" varieties are mostly planted in the United States as summer annuals. In Europe, the "cauliflower heading" is grown. This hardier variety is grown and harvested in winter and in spring. The American-grown broccoli became popular recently after it was widely known that green vegetables are more packed with vitamins than blanched vegetables. This vegetable is known for a number of its health benefits. And with that, broccoli consumption has mammothed to over 900 percent for the last 30 years! It is a very good source of Vitamin A, a nutrient responsible for giving good vision and preventing certain eye-related ailments such as cataracts or macular degeneration. This nutrient is also essential in bone growth and development as well as fostering the body's immune system. It is also rich in Vitamin C, iron, potassium, folacin and fiber. It also contains a few important phytochemicals such as beta-carotene, isothiocyanates and indoles. Vitamin C is a potent antioxidant the body needs to battle against free radicals that cause cancer. It is a natural anti-carcinogen lessening the risk of developing cancer cells. Phytochemicals also prevent carcinogens from forming. They also impede these cancer-causing cells from attacking target cells and helps increase enzymes needed to detoxify them. Iron is essential in energy production, proper transmission of oxygen through the body and good mental health. For developing children and teenagers, it plays a decisive role in their growth and physical development. Folacin, or folic acid, is a B vitamin the body needs for cell growth and reproduction. Broccoli is sold in the market either fresh or frozen. In selecting the best bunch out of a grocery store, be sure to pick only the fresh ones. Choose clusters which are dark green. Remember, good color is often an indicator of high nutrient value. Dark-green, purplish or bluish-green florets, or flower buds, contain more beta-carotene and vitamin C than pale, yellowing ones. The greener the broccoli is, the higher its beta-carotene content. Stalks should be firm and not bend or with a rubbery texture. Avoid those with tough, woody stems as well as those with open, discolored bud clusters. However, if you would choose the packaged frozen ones, it is important to note that they differ from fresh ones in terms of nutritional content. Manufacturers cut off the florets from the stalks before packaging. The florets usually contain higher levels of beta-carotene than the stalks, so frozen broccoli have higher beta-carotene content compared to fresh broccoli of the same weight. Although they do have more beta-carotene, as compared to fresh broccoli they have half as much calcium and lesser amounts of iron and vitamin C. If you are on an iron rich diet, it would be best to opt for the fresh ones.

About the Author

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