September is National Fruits and Veggies month

Summer’s bounty helps make eating healthy an easy choice

MANHATTAN, Kan. – It’s not really a coincidence that the Produce for Better Health Foundation recently named September as National Fruits and Veggies month in the United States.

Summer is filled with colorful fruits and vegetables, from watermelon to melons, tomatoes to greens, and many more. It’s the season to indulge in foods that are tasty and good for you, too.

“There are many reasons to include fruits and vegetables every day in a meal or snack,” said Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee. “The fiber in produce helps keep you full, helps improve digestion and helps reduce risks and effects of several diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and more.”

Many fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins and minerals that our bodies can’t produce on their own, said Blakeslee, who recommends filling half of your plate during meals with fruits and vegetables.

“By consuming more fruits and vegetables, you lower calorie intake, reduce weight gain and reduce the intake of high-calorie foods,” she said. “Whether they are fresh, frozen, canned or dried, fruits and vegetables can be consumed year-round.”

In fact, with many garden foods reaching harvest, it’s a perfect time to preserve fresh produce. Blakeslee said freezing is easy and doesn’t take a lot of equipment; many foods can be frozen, though some – such as lettuce – do not freeze well.

“Canning and pickling are great options to reduce food waste,” Blakeslee said.

In a monthly newsletter she publishes in her role as coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for food science, Blakeslee suggests trying something new: Watermelon Rind Pickles.

“After enjoying the juicy watermelon fruit, save the rinds and turn them into a unique pickle,” she said. “Always follow tested recipes and instructions for best safety and quality for all food preservation methods.”
National Fruits and Veggies month also comes with a reminder to cut food waste in the United States. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that nearly 40% of food waste occurs at home.

“When shopping, plan meals and snacks to be a better shopper,” Blakeslee said. “Before going to the store, shop your kitchen first. Incorporate what you already have into menus. Know your schedule and family likes to be sure fresh produce is used before it gets wasted.”

Other tips for reducing food waste include:

- Add perishable foods to a casserole, salad or soup.
- Freeze fresh produce to use later.
- Don’t buy in bulk if it’s not an item you can use quickly.
- Prepare fresh produce so that it’s easy to grab and go for easy snacks.
- If food is spoiled, consider composting if you have space available.

More information on incorporating fruits and vegetables into your daily diet plan – not just in September – is available from several sources, including:

- K-State Research and Extension food, Nutrition, Dietetics and Health: www.ksre.ksu.edu/humannutrition.
- Produce for a Better Health Foundation: https://fruitsandveggies.org
- USDA MyPlate: https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Produce for a Better Health Foundation, https://fruitsandveggies.org/
You Asked It! (newsletter), www.rrc.k-state.edu/newsletter/index.html
Rapid Response Center for food science, www.rrc.ksu.edu
Watermelon Rind Pickles (recipe), https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_06/watermelon_rind.html
Food preservation methods, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/index.html

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