



# Eat Your Colors

We all know that antioxidants keep us young and healthy. But how to work them into our diets? Fill those plates with color! **BY ELLIE KRIEGER**

I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF COLOR. I accent my office with red to help me stay energized and focused; my bedroom is swathed in calming, cool neutrals; and my living room is filled with inviting warm orange tones. I like to carry a bright umbrella on a rainy day. It's human nature to be drawn in by color and respond to it on an emotional level. That's why it makes perfect sense that nature has fashioned its most nutritious foods to be the most attractively and desirably colorful. To get the full spectrum of health-protective antioxidants, all you need to do is eat the rainbow in produce.

You see, antioxidants (compounds found in food that protect our cells from damage, helping us stay youthful and healthy) can actually impart different colors to fruits and vegetables. Beta carotene, for instance, gives carrots, mangos, and winter squash their brilliant yellow-orange hue. Tomatoes and watermelon can credit lycopene for making them red, and blueberries have anthocyanins to thank for their blue-ness.

Color also makes food appealing and exciting. So there's no better way for a food lover (who also cares about health) to approach a meal than to eat colorfully. You don't need to eat all the colors of the spectrum in one sitting, though. Spreading them throughout the week is a smart way to a balanced diet. Think of the plate as a canvas and add splashes of color wherever possible.

Of course, you can pile all the colors on one plate as well, as I do in this delicious grilled vegetable salad, which taps most of the rainbow—red tomatoes, orange peppers, yellow and green squash, and violet-red onion. Not only is this dish a nutritional powerhouse, but it also has big flavor and visual appeal. And it's versatile, too: You can substitute any combination of vegetables you have on hand. Just remember to think color.

## Good to Know

Before eating, ask yourself, Where's the color in this dish? If it's not there, add it—here are some colorful ideas.

- Add blueberries, dried cherries, or sliced strawberries to your cereal or oatmeal.
- Spread creamy ripe avocado on your toast and top with a slice of tomato.
- Pile shaved carrots and cucumber on your sandwich.
- Replace pale lettuce in your salad with dark-green arugula or spinach; add orange or grapefruit segments, sliced pears or apples, or pomegranate seeds.
- Stir chopped kale or escarole into your pasta sauce or bean or lentil soup.
- Toss chopped tomatoes and fresh herbs into your scrambled eggs.



*“There’s no better way for a food lover (who also cares about health) to approach a meal than to eat colorfully,” says Ellie.*

## grilled vegetable salad with feta

This fresh, colorful salad is perfect with grilled or roast chicken, steak, or lamb, and a slice of crusty bread.

**Serves 4 as a side**

- 1 small or ½ medium fennel bulb with fronds attached
- 1 medium orange bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut lengthwise into 4 or 5 pieces
- 1 medium red onion, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1 medium zucchini, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1 medium yellow squash, cut lengthwise into ¼-inch-thick slices
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt
- 3 Tbs. red wine vinegar
- Freshly ground black pepper

- 1½ cups grape tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese (2½ oz.)
- 3 Tbs. loosely packed thinly sliced fresh basil

**Cut the stalks** off the fennel bulb. Remove about ¼ cup of the fronds from the stalks, chop the fronds, and reserve. Cut the fennel in quarters lengthwise and trim away most of the core, leaving just enough intact to keep the layers together. Slice the quarters lengthwise ¼ inch thick.

**Prepare a medium** gas or charcoal grill fire (alternatively, use an indoor grill pan over medium-high heat). Arrange the vegetables in a single layer on a tray or work surface. Brush both sides of the vegetables with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and season with ¼ tsp. salt.

**Grill the vegetables** in batches, flipping once, until both sides are nicely charred and the vegetables are just tender, about 12 minutes total for the fennel, 10 minutes total for the pepper, and 6 minutes total for the onion and squash. When the vegetables are cool enough to handle, cut them into ½-inch dice and transfer to a large bowl.

**In a small bowl**, whisk the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil, the vinegar, ¼ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Toss the vegetables with the dressing. Gently stir in the tomatoes and fennel fronds. Season to taste with more salt and pepper. Divide the salad among 4 plates and sprinkle with the feta and basil.

*Registered dietitian Ellie Krieger is a Fine Cooking contributing editor.*

