

Lifestyle Trend: Drinking Your Fruit & Vegetables

Veggie gardening at the consumer level is certainly nothing new, but how can you capitalize on lifestyle trends within this ever-growing category? Drink up!

BY HEATHER KIBBLE

Imagine a grande (big!) farm in Baja Mexico. A warm summer day. Watermelon fields as far as the eye can see in nearly every direction. It's lunch time and the soft tacos are served as they should be: all-you-can eat, with hand-cut salsa and shredded cabbage. And the perfect drink for this picnic? Melon juice!

I've had the joy of visiting Mexico several times and I've been to South America, as well. These places celebrate the cantaloupe, the honeydew and the watermelon with huge glass dispensers filled with jewel-toned beverages that can satisfy the most parched visitor. I vote we make a melon juice dispenser part of the American picnic. Melon plants are easy to grow and there are varieties suited to each part of the country.

In California, fresh juice has long been a part of the food culture. Juice bars, health food stores and vegetarian restaurants usually serve fresh juice and have been popular since the 1970s. Juicing is easy to do at home, as well. And if you have a garden, you have fresh ingredients right at your door. Most people think of oranges of course, but all kinds of fruits and vegetables are great for juicing. Apple/carrot has always been one of my favorites, along with tangerine. Melons and berries with a touch of basil or mint are a fantastic summer option. Beets make a bright, healthy juice with 58 calories and 13 grams of carbohydrates per cup. Don't forget to save those beet greens for smoothies and remember the pulp left after the juice is extracted composts beautifully.

Smoothies also can add some needed servings of vegetables and fruits to our diets. They are my go-to breakfast and perfect



for a light lunch. Many vegetables, including leafy greens are wonderful in smoothies and easy to grow in the garden. Less common but tasty vegetables for smoothies include pumpkin, butternut squash, cucumbers and melon. Remember herbs — all the fantastic varieties of basil, mint, and dill you can only get from a home garden add a pop of flavor to both creamy and sweet blends.

RETAILERS CAN INSPIRE CUSTOMERS AND BOOST PLANT SALES

Group plants and herbs listed below, offer recipe cards (see recipes below) or start a recipe Pinterest board and ask your customers to follow or send their favorite recipes. Whether selling plants or seeds, it is important to remind people to sow or transplant often. A little extra effort during their planting window will extend their harvest and make healthy fruit and vegetables more available. Push the greens — they can be grown for most of the year and should be planted every couple weeks. This means return business, even in traditionally slow vegetable gardening months. Many herbs are happy together in larger containers and greens can work in color bowl or bulb-type pots that can sell as a “grab and go” option for customers that don't have in-ground space.

TIPS FOR GROWERS

Gardens grown for smoothies and juices will benefit from succession planting so it is best to space out planting for sales.

Melon plants are easy to grow and there are many different varieties suited for each part of the country.

FRESH FARE

Vegetables in general grow very quickly and do not need much lead time. Your final customer will be much more successful transplanting small young plants that have not outgrown the container they are sold in.

Greens and herb leaves are

harvested young and eaten shortly after they leave your facility so treat them accordingly. Greens should be seeded directly into the pot they will be sold in, especially root crops such as beets that hate to be transplanted. Look for new beet varieties grown just for the greens

and spinach bred for baby leaf. Larger containers and bowls should be planted at very close spacing to fill in and look nice. Small containers should have one to three plants at the most for greens and one plant for the melons, pumpkins and squash.

SMOOTHIE TIPS TO PASS ON TO THE CONSUMER

The key to making smoothies an easy meal option is a little planning. Here is what I do:

- I keep a “bullet” type blender on the counter, near the sink. I have several extra cups so each family member can have their own. Smoothies are the perfect answer for picky eaters since you make one serving at a time.
- Grow lots of pumpkins and winter squash! I bake them (halved and seeded) in a pan of

A few of my favorite smoothie recipes to get you started:

Go Green — Blend together ½ a banana, 1 teaspoon matcha green tea powder, a few chunks of frozen mango, ⅓ cup frozen kale, a few chopped basil leaves and about ½ cup of cashew milk and 2 teaspoons sugar. Add more milk if it is too thick.

Peanut butter lover — Blend together ½ banana, ⅓ cup squash puree, 1 tablespoon peanut butter or peanut butter powder, 2 teaspoons brown sugar or maple syrup, 1 tablespoon wheat germ, a sprinkle of cinnamon, and ½ cup milk.

Pumpkin Pie — Blend together one small banana chunk, one scoop plain or vanilla protein powder, ¼ cup pumpkin or squash puree, 1 teaspoon fresh ginger and ½ cup milk. For sweetness, you can add 1 to 2 teaspoons sugar, agave or maple syrup. Top with a sprinkle of pumpkin pie spice and/or whipped cream.

I've found blending is easier if you start with a little liquid at the bottom of the cup, then add chunkier ingredients, then powders and the rest of your liquid. You want your smoothie smooth!



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shallow water. I peel the cooked fruit and keep the pulp in the fridge and freezer. It is now ready to go for smoothies (and breads and soups).

- Grow greens! There are all kinds of types available and most are great in smoothies. My favorites include spinach, beet greens, Swiss chard, and kale. All can be harvested, chopped and frozen into baggies so they are ready to go. Frozen greens are easier to blend.
- Pick your liquids. Non-fat milk, unsweetened soy milk, almond and cashew milks are all good creamy options. Fruit juice tastes good but can add calories quickly so use sparingly. For a tropical flavor I use coconut water.

- Pick a thickening base. Most people use about 1/2 a banana per smoothie. I keep peeled chunks in the freezer. Other good options are non-fat Greek yogurt, nut butters, powdered peanut butter, berries, mango, protein powders and pineapple.
- Customize. I keep matcha powder, wheat germ, grated ginger, oats, bran, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, and carob powder on hand to keep things interesting. [gpn](http://gpn.com)

Heather Kibble is sales manager for Sakata Home Grown. An avid flower and vegetable gardener, she has nearly 20 years of experience in the home garden vegetable industry.



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