

# The Nutritious Nibble



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Spring! The time to renew, revitalize and get ready for summer break.



Soon our farmers markets, roadside stands and grocery stores will be full of spring and summer bounty such as strawberries, asparagus, arugula, beets, carrots, watermelons, tomatoes, cucumbers and leafy greens, making this a great time to do a spring cleaning of our eating habits. Certainly, I'm not the only one who has been a little lazy with the meal prep!

Spring makes it easy to allow fresh healthy foods to crowd out unhealthy food and habits. Take your focus away from what to avoid and allow colorful seasonal foods to fill your plate. Local varieties of foods like asparagus and strawberries are always so much more flavorful and with a deeper aroma than the imported varieties.

Local produce also has a higher level of freshness and nutrients, such as bioactive compounds, that benefit our bodies in a deep way. Bioactives in foods are substances that are not essential, such as vitamins and minerals are, but do influence our health and wellness. Today we will focus on just two: quercetin and lycopene.

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Quercetin is found in locally grown favorites such as berries, leafy greens, radishes and onions. It has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antihistamine effects that may help reduce inflammation, fight allergies, control blood sugar and prevent heart disease. Quercetin is also found in green tea, apples, cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and whole grains, among other foods.

Another powerful bioactive is lycopene, found in watermelon, grapefruit and cooked tomatoes; it also is a powerful antioxidant.

These bioactives give our body the information it needs to produce a firehose of free-radical-quenching activity. They work to keep our insides healthy.

Quercetin is sensitive to heat. Take these steps to increase its bioavailability; when cooking avoid high heat and aim for a shorter cooking time. Choose steaming or a quick stir fry over roasting and boiling. When using cruciferous vegetables, such as cabbage or broccoli, chop an hour or so before cooking. This allows for chemical changes that make the bioactive more plentiful and resistant to heat.

When making a salad or slaw add the dressing at the last minute. The acid in it, from lemon or vinegar for example, will also deactivate bioactives.

The lycopene found in tomatoes produces benefits when cooked. When tomatoes are cooked or slowly dehydrated the lycopene is changed into a more user friendly form and so its actions are increased. So that marinara sauce and sun-dried tomatoes are the way to go!

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For the most benefit, eat an assortment of cooked and raw vegetables. Aim for an assortment of color and at least three-five servings daily. All vegetables, no matter how they are cooked or when the dressing was put on them, have numerous health benefits and provide essential ingredients in the recipe for good health and wellness.



## Local Guide

What's ripe when in Maryland

## Recipe

Spring Cleaning Detox Salad

## The Science

For more on quercetin and helpful links to research articles:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4808895/>

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