

Vary the Vegetable

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THE late summer and early fall is a hot, lazy time when the business of planning food for the family is not a particularly interesting one. There are vegetables to cook and vegetables to can until one's hands are hopelessly stained and we almost wish there were no vegetables.

But did you ever stop to think how monotonous and uninteresting our meals would be if there were no vegetables—or if all the vegetables were white? Against the background of our white flour, white sugar and clear white fat, the red tomato and yellow carrot and green spinach are splashes of interesting color and flavor. The possible combinations of color and flavor are almost endless at this time of year when there are so many vegetables available.

Iron—so necessary to the body—is found in spinach and other greens. Physicians tell us that the natural iron of food is more readily used by the body than the iron contained in medicines, and indeed it is more pleasant to take. Children need lots of iron in their diet, and if they do not like the green vegetables it is surely no more trouble to teach them to like these foods than it is to give them bitter tonics.

Tomato and spinach pulp are often given to a very small child that he may have a good start in life with a plentiful supply of the valuable food elements.

In fact, all of our scientific knowledge of foods gives us more and more respect for vegetables until we wonder that many people seem to take so little interest in them. One very practical suggestion has been made that instead of talking so much about the value of vegetables it might be more effective to teach people to cook and serve them more temptingly.

There is no doubt but that the poor cooking of vegetables has been one great reason for their unpopularity. Many housewives have not realized that vegetables require careful handling and cooking to make them attractive. The rules for vegetable cookery are not new or startling, but they have not been heeded.

Take for example, such a common thing as a boiled potato. Boiled potatoes are common, but good boiled potatoes—tender, mealy and well done—are quite uncommon in many American homes. It is not enough to merely thrust a potato into a pan of water and cook it until it ceases to be raw. To have a satisfactory product one must follow the rules of the game and in this case the rules are very simple.

Add salt to the water which must be boiling rapidly before the potatoes are put into it, otherwise a great deal of the nutritive value of the potato will be dissolved out and lost. As the cooking proceeds the water present in the cells of the potato is changed to steam. This steam cooks the starch making the

potato mealy and tender. If, however, the water in the kettle merely simmers or ceases to boil at any time during the cooking, the steam in the cells is condensed to water and the result is a soggy potato. When done, drain at once and shake the pan or kettle over the fire until the potatoes are dried on all sides. Starchy vegetables allowed to stand in the water, or merely drained and not dried, will always be soggy on the outside.

Another cause of soggy vegetables, whether starchy or otherwise, is overcooking. Cook vegetables only until they are tender when pierced. Further cooking causes them to mush or break up, making a limp, soggy discouraged looking mess that is decidedly unpalatable. Mistreated in this way, vegetables lose their individuality and all look and taste alike. It naturally follows that vegetables will become monotonous if they all look and taste alike. One cannot blame the family if they choose to eat bread and meat instead.

Strongly flavored vegetables such as cabbage and onions are much more attractive and appetizing if cooked in a large quantity of water in an uncovered kettle so that much of the strong odor and flavor escapes in the steam. With a little careful watching the liquid can be cooked down until it is practically all absorbed into the vegetable. On the other hand, fresh green vegetables such as asparagus and spinach should be cooked very quickly in a very small amount of water so that the good juices and fresh flavor may be retained as far as possible.

Well prepared vegetables are always best when served simply, that is with

just butter and salt and their own juices. If any one vegetable is uninteresting when served alone, the addition of another of contrasting color and flavor will serve to make it attractive. Plain white turnips look insipid alone but command attention when combined with green peas.

Out here in "Ioway" we merrily sing our corn song on all occasions but sometimes in August, the constant repetition of corn and tomatoes, and tomatoes and corn bores us and we long for some other food. Just for a change try baking the corn in a custard. Cut boiled corn off the cob and mix it with an unsweetened custard mixture. Bake in a large mold or pudding dish in a slow oven until firm. Turn on to a hot platter and serve with slices of hot broiled tomatoes as a garnish. The tomatoes may be dipped in melted butter and cooked in a broiler, or they may be browned in a little butter in a frying pan. The yellow mold of corn and the red tomatoes make a very attractive dish.

Corn omelet is another delightful combination of corn and eggs, especially if served with a tart jelly or a pickle relish. Either of the above dishes will take the place of meat since the eggs supply the protein.

If you are tired of beets the same old way, glaze them. Heat two tablespoonsful of sugar with two tablespoonsful of butter in a frying pan until the sugar melts. Add boiled beets and cook very slowly over a mat for 15 or 20 minutes, turning the beets occasionally until they have a glossy coating. Tiny glazed beets of even size make a pretty garnish for a meat dish or for a platter of mixed vegetables. However, cubed or sliced beets may be treated in the same way and served as a vegetable. Glazed onions, using the small white ones, are delicious and different.

The plebian parsnip made into fritters becomes quite an unusual dish for luncheon or supper. Dip pieces of cooked parsnip into a fritter batter and fry in deep fat. Served with tomato catsup and crisp bacon, your family will shout for more.

Raw carrots have become quite a fad in home economics circles since we have learned to appreciate the value of raw foods. Shredded cabbage with a tiny bit of green pepper and a pile of grated carrot on top is quite a favorite. We sometimes call it vitamin salad.

Green string beans and carrots cooked this time, make a popular salad for luncheon or supper. The green and yellow color combination is so attractive that one suspects much of the popularity of this salad to be due to its appearance.

Salsify, suggestive of oysters, and celeric, with a celery flavor, are two root vegetables of the late fall that seem to be very well liked where they are at

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all known, but many people seem not to have made their acquaintance. They are easily grown, will stand frost, and are usually very cheap, selling at two or three cents a pound. They may be boiled and served buttered or creamed, in soup or in salad. It would be well worth while to cultivate their acquaintance if you have not already done so.

Then there are stuffed vegetables: baked tomatoes stuffed with buttered crumbs or with an egg baked in each tomato cup, cabbage leaves rolled around a meat stuffing or the whole head stuffed with meat or cheese mixture, peppers stuffed with rice or crumbs with ham or veal, or large onions stuffed with minced dried beef and crumbs. In fact one never failing recipe for variety is to concoct a new stuffing or stuff a different vegetable. If, at any time, you think you have exhausted all the possibilities hunt up an Armenian cook book and you will find that almost two-thirds of all the recipes in the book are for "dolmas," dolma being their name for dishes with stuffing.

It would seem with the endless possibilities, that our meals need never be monotonous. Every housewife should recognize the vegetable as an aristocrat in food society and should prepare and serve it most carefully so that the family will learn to treat it with proper respect. Any mother who succeeds in making vegetables popular on her table has solved one of the biggest problems in the feeding of her family.

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