

What Are Healthy Fall Foods? 7 Seasonal Picks to Try

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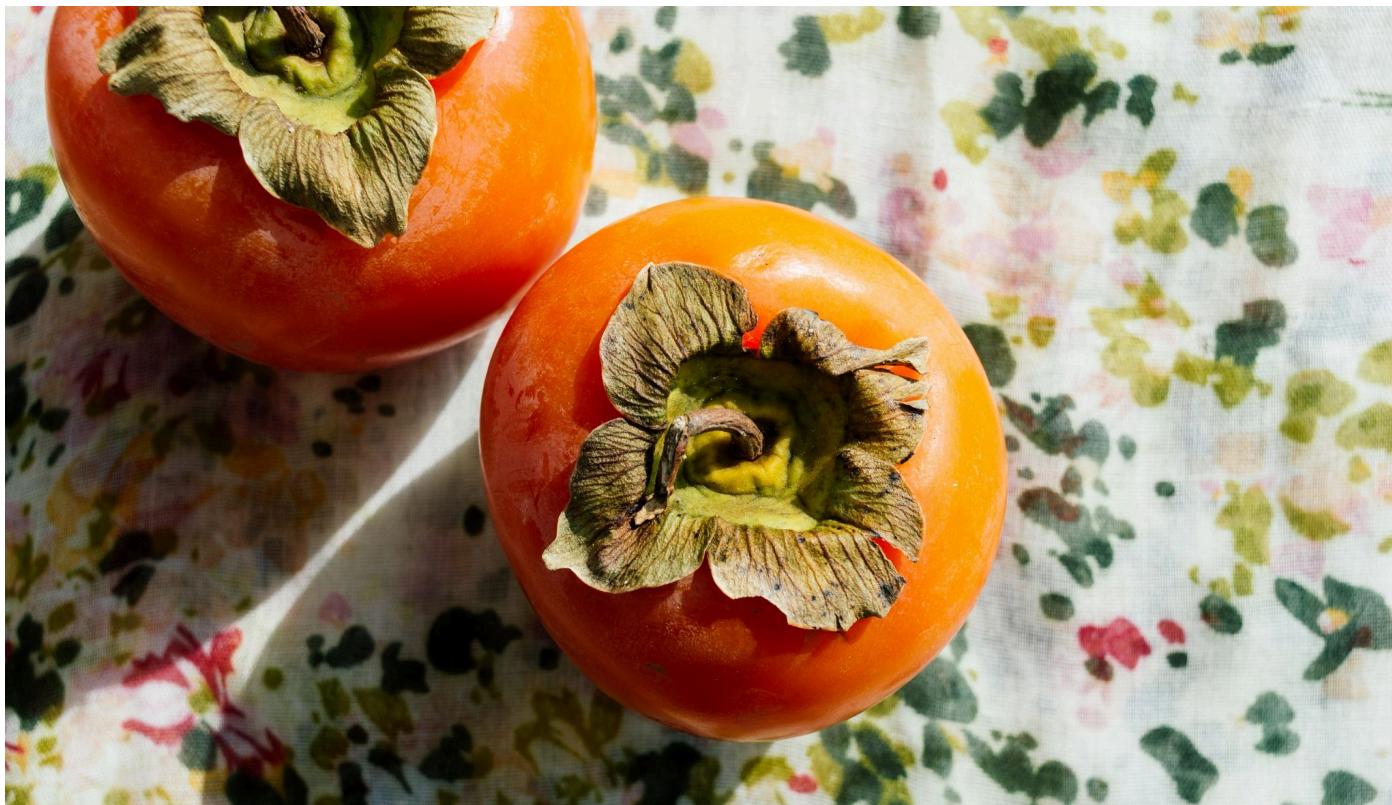


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Just weeks ago, you were wearing shorts. Suddenly the air has a chill, the foliage is stunning and the sky turns dark before dinner. You might think your chances for eating fresh, seasonal foods are dwindling fast. That's true, as far as corn and watermelon are concerned. On the other hand, fall ushers in produce that mimics the changing leaves — deep shades of red, orange and yellow amid patches of green. Phytonutrients, the plant compounds that produce those hues, also provide numerous benefits to your health.

Plus, seriously, how many tomatoes can a person eat?

Here are seven seasonal options that are just hitting their peak. Some will be familiar, while others are just waiting for you to try them. Don't worry, we've included suggestions on how to cook them.



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1. Persimmons

It looks something like a tomato, but persimmons' honeyed flavor is all its own. And that gorgeous, orangey-red color means they're packed with antioxidants like beta carotene.

"This helps protect against oxidative stress," says Theresa Gentile, a nutritionist and a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, which, she adds, contributes to heart disease, cognitive decline and some cancers.

Eating persimmons can also help [protect your vision](#). One persimmon has about 55 percent of your day's recommended dose of vitamin A, which supports your retinas, as well as lutein and zeaxanthin, a pair of carotenoids that can fight age-related macular degeneration.

In the U.S., persimmons come mainly in two types. Fuyu, which have the roundness of a tomato and a flavor reminiscent of apricots, can be eaten raw like an apple. Hachiya persimmons look more like a large acorn. They get soft and jelly-like inside when ripe — don't try to eat them firm, or you'll find them unpleasantly chalky and bitter. Stir the soft pulp into yogurt or use it for baking. Use sliced persimmons in salads or on [cheese boards](#).



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2. Kohlrabi

With stems shooting from all over its bulbous body, kohlrabi is one of the stranger-looking vegetables you'll come across. But don't let that intimidate you. Kohlrabi's milder taste will win you over. When raw, it has the crunch of an apple and a hint of bitterness similar to broccoli stems (which makes sense, since they're in the same family). Cook it, and the flesh mellows and becomes faintly sweet.

"It's a cruciferous vegetable, so it has [cancer-protective compounds](#)," Gentile says. "Those sulfur compounds have been shown to reduce inflammation and possibly lower the risk of some cancer."

Plus, one cup of kohlrabi has more vitamin C than a medium-sized orange — and because it's rich in potassium and fiber, it can help lower your blood pressure and support healthy cholesterol levels.

Kohlrabi mainly comes in two different colors, green and purple. Green is easier to find in supermarkets, but if you do see purple, grab some. That color comes from anthocyanins, powerful phytonutrients that can fight inflammation and are associated with lowering your risk of conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

Peel kohlrabi and cut into chunks for a low-carb swap for roasted potatoes. Or slice it to toss into stir-fries. Use it raw in salads and slaws, or cut into matchsticks to add crunch to [Thai Curry Peanut Noodles](#).

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3. Beets

The deep, earthy sweetness of a roasted beet is — forgive the pun — hard to beat. And the humble root vegetable is a nutritional powerhouse. A 2021 review in *Food Science & Nutrition* compiled data from more than 50 studies and found that [antioxidant-rich beets exhibit cancer fighting properties](#), contribute to both improved cognitive function and exercise performance, and have been shown to help manage blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

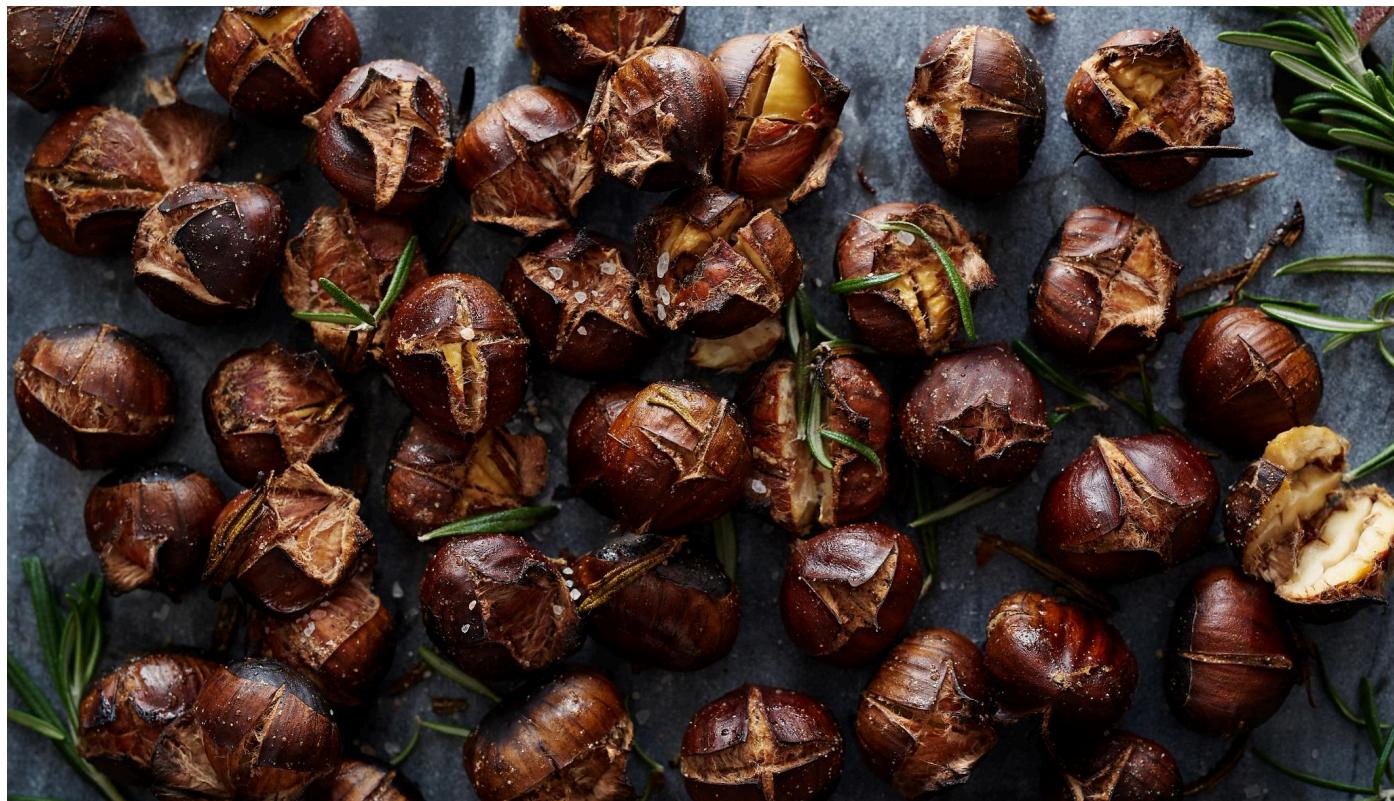
One thing that makes beets special: their high nitrate content. Your body converts nitrate to nitric oxide, which opens up your blood vessels. That means it can significantly lower blood pressure. So much so, that if you take blood pressure medication, you need to take care.

“Watch it if you juice fresh beets daily,” says Sue-Ellen Anderson-Haynes, nutritionist and founder/CEO of 360Girls&Women and an Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics spokesperson. “It is that potent.”

If you buy beets with the greens attached, don't toss them. Beet greens are chock-full of nutrients including minerals like magnesium, copper, calcium and potassium, says Gentile. Those minerals contribute to bone and heart health, your energy level and your [immune system](#).

"Chop them up, sauté them, throw in a soup — don't waste them," Gentile says.

Try this easy recipe for [Roasted Beets and Greens](#) to make the most of both parts of the beet.



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4. Chestnuts

If you're saving these lightly sweet morsels for the holidays, you're missing out.

Chestnuts are lower in fat than most nuts and a good source of phenols and flavonoids — antioxidants that help prevent cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. And they provide both manganese and copper, which "are essential for bone mineralization and helps form collagen," Gentile says. "That can support joint strength and mobility."

You can buy chestnuts pre-roasted and peeled, ready to eat. But if you're game, roast them yourself. To do it, wash your chestnuts and use a small, sharp knife to carefully make an X through the shell and membrane of each. Put them in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet and bake at 350° F for 35 to 40 minutes. They're ready when you can easily pierce the flesh with a knife. To make peeling easier, the pros at [Food52](#) recommend wrapping the hot chestnuts in a towel for eight to 10 minutes first.

Eat them warm for the ultimate autumnal experience, or use them in a recipe like [Sticky Rice Stuffing with Pumpkin and Chestnuts](#).



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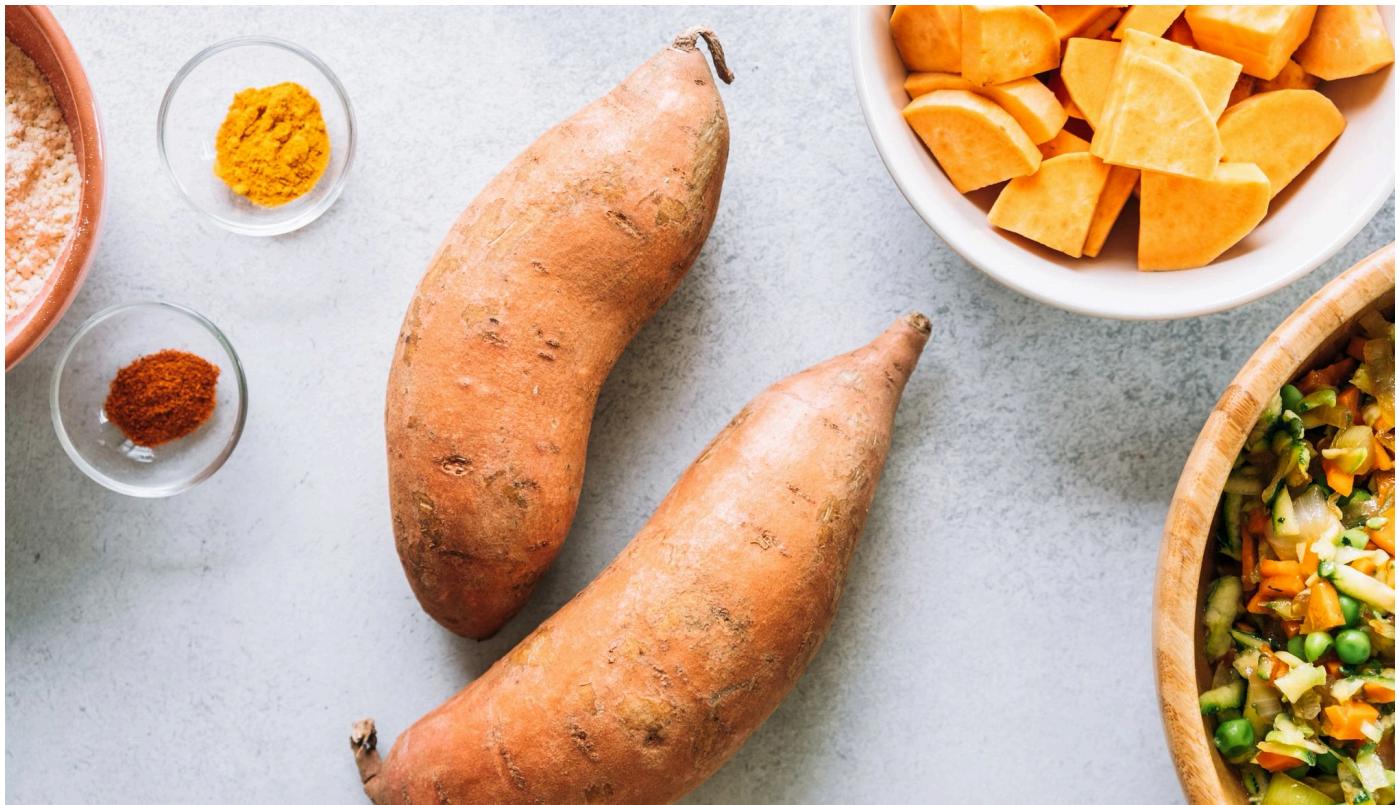
5. Parsnips

Carrots' paler cousin, parsnips don't get much attention — and that's a mistake.

"People say to stay away from white foods, but these are low in carbohydrates," says Anderson-Haynes. "They're a non-starchy vegetable, and half your plate should be filled with non-starchy vegetables."

One cup of cooked parsnip has nearly 6 grams of fiber, about 12 percent of your daily dose of potassium, and almost one-quarter of the recommended amount of folate, which may [reduce your risk of Alzheimer's disease](#). It also contains high amounts of a plant compound known as coumarin, which demonstrates anti-cancer properties.

Use parsnips anywhere you would potatoes. They're especially good for mashed potato fans: Swap out half your spuds for 'snips, and you'll have all the satisfaction with far fewer carbs and more fiber. Or try this [Curried Parsnip & Apple Soup](#).



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6. Sweet Potatoes

You're probably well acquainted with this staple of the Thanksgiving table, but they're more than just, y'know, potatoes that taste sweet.

That has a lot to do with their color. Deeper orange flesh means more carotenoids, Gentile says. That makes them helpful for night vision and why they've been associated with preventing age-related macular degeneration. They're also good for the immune system, and their soluble fiber and resistant starch make them great for your gut bacteria and blood sugar control.

Purple-fleshed sweet potatoes may not be everywhere yet, but they're becoming more widely available. Just like with purple kohlrabi, buy them when you see them. Again, it's the anthocyanins.

"Purple sweet potatoes offer extra antioxidants," Gentile says, "and can help regulate blood sugar even more."

Another variety making its way to many supermarkets is satsumaimo, Japanese sweet potato. It has magenta skin and dense, pale yellow flesh. This potato has an almost nutty quality — it's less sweet than the usual orange kind, too.

Don't save sweet potatoes for side dishes. Why would you, when you can make [Sweet Potato and Black Bean Chili](#)?



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7. Winter Squash

Butternut, acorn and pumpkin used to be the main supermarket varieties of these hardy gourds. Expand your horizons with newer-to-market options like the small honeynut, stringy spaghetti or dense kabocha. You can't go wrong nutritionally — they've all got phytonutrients galore, thanks to their varied colors.

A 2021 review of studies in *Phytotherapy Research* linked the [antioxidants in the Cucurbita genus](#), which includes squashes like butternut, pumpkin and hubbard (one of the larger winter squashes) to lower risks of a wide range of conditions, including heart disease, several cancers and diabetes, and even improved menopause symptoms.

While most winter squashes have tough outer skin, some, like the striped delicata, don't need to be peeled before eating. That's a good thing, Gentile points out, because the skin contains a lot of the vegetable's fiber content.

Delicata's oblong shape makes it a great candidate for stuffing, like in this [Quinoa-Stuffed Delicata Squash](#).

Debbie Koenig is a New York-based writer whose work has appeared in The New York Times, Eating Well, WebMD, and dozens of other publications.