

MULTICOLORED CAULIFLOWER



- Multicolored cauliflower is rather new to the Yuma area and acreage of this tasty crop ranges from 150 to 200 acres, yields are comparable to that of white cauliflower.
- Multicolored cauliflower a result of breeding experiments at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, N.Y. Scientists have, in effect, bred a bit of carotene into the cauliflower, turning it orange and 100 times richer than its pale ancestors as a source of vitamin A. Dr. Michael Dickson started with a genetic accident - a dwarf, orange-colored mutant found in a field of full-sized white cauliflower heads near Toronto. The orange color of the mutant was triggered by the natural pigment, carotene, which the human body converts to vitamin A. The colored cauliflower are the results of traditional selective breeding - where different strains have been cross bred and cross bred until these strains have been created. By crossing the mutant with an ordinary white cauliflower, Dr. Dickson was able to produce a new hybrid variety that is large, tasty and orange.
- An orange colored cauliflower that is a new variety that became available in some supermarkets and farmers' markets in late fall of 2003. It is very similar to regular white cauliflower in taste and appearance except it is bright orange in color. The first variety of orange cauliflower, which was smaller and not as flavorful, was discovered in Canada in 1970 but it took decades of crossbreeding to finally develop the variety that is now available. Because of its high content of beta-carotene, orange cauliflower's vitamin A content is approximately 25 times higher than white cauliflower. Its color and nutritional value are two characteristics that will make this a popular vegetable choice.
- While traditionalists may balk at the unusual colors, it is not the first time that plant breeders have changed the appearance of vegetables. Until the 17th century most carrots eaten Europe were white, yellow or purple. The orange pigment was added by Dutch plant breeders looking for a way to celebrate Holland's royal family. The last few years has seen the introduction of purple carrots to some supermarkets, along with yellow tomatoes and purple potatoes.
- Scientists have developed amazing variants of vegetable where the traditional white florets have been changed to a garish orange, purple and green. The "rainbow cauliflowers" are said to taste the same as the normal varieties, but add a splash of color to the dinner table. And, some scientists have even claimed that they are healthier for you.
- The ups and downs of cauliflower's fortunes have, in the 500-odd years since it was introduced to Europe, have been extreme. Probably originating in the Far East and carried by Arab traders to the Mediterranean, it was then brought to England by Flemish weavers in the mid-1600s and later became the rage of the French. In the modern era, however, cauliflower fell into a period of obscurity, languishing upon appetizer trays. Perhaps the lowest point came at a 1990 news conference, when then-President George H.W. Bush, discussing vegetables he didn't have to eat anymore now that he was president, gave it a thumbs down along with broccoli, Brussels sprouts and lima beans.
- But cauliflower has been having a renaissance lately, thanks not only to appealing colored varieties showing up in farmers markets and grocery stores but also to chefs who have rediscovered the vegetable's subtle charms.

- Colored varieties such as purple Graffiti, orange Cheddar and stunning green Romanesco cauliflowers that are in many markets and produce aisles are now in a range of sizes. They are not genetically engineered but rather a mixture of heirloom varieties, naturally occurring accidents and the hybrids grown from them.
- Purple and orange cauliflowers are fairly recent discoveries, dating back only a few decades to separate occasions when farmers noticed an unusually colored plant growing in a white-and-green cauliflower field. Scientists then bred the colorful anomalies into distinct varieties, improving upon taste, color and hardiness.
- The new cauliflower colors not only liven up the plate visually but also are significant indicators of flavor and health benefits. Purple cauliflower, which gets its distinctive deep lavender color from anthocyanins, the antioxidant also found in red wine, has a milder flavor than white cauliflower — it's sweeter, nuttier and without the bitterness sometimes found in white cauliflower. Steamed, simmered or roasted, it retains its lavender beauty, especially with a little lemon or vinegar splashed on before cooking (though some purple varieties can turn green if overcooked).
- But cauliflower also can stand on its own, especially when milked into a subtle cream or a panna cotta. Dairy provides a wonderful and gentle medium for cauliflower, bringing out its mellow essence.
- When selecting cauliflower, look for heads without any speckles, and leaves that are strong and not wilted. White cauliflower is widely available year-round and thanks to their popularity with many chefs, the purple, orange and purple varieties are increasingly easy to find. The colored varieties are seasonal and best in the Yuma area from January through mid-March.
- Cauliflower is a vegetable that consists of undeveloped white florets attached to a single stem that form a compact, cabbage-like head, called a curd, and is generally 6 to 7 inches in diameter. The head is surrounded by long green leaves that are attached to the stem which protect the cauliflower from the sunlight, preventing chlorophyll from developing in the cauliflower. The older varieties of cauliflower had to have the leaves tied up around the curd to protect it but now varieties have been developed where the leaves grow up and around the curd to protect it without tying. Cauliflower is closely related to broccoli but has a denser, more compact head, and it is most often white. It has a creamy, sweet, slightly nutty flavor and even though the florets are the most common part of the cauliflower that is eaten, the stem and leaves are also edible.

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