

Brassica tactics

Cauliflower packs a nutritional punch

MEDIABAKERY

By **Kate Parham**

LAST YEAR, EVERYONE was kale crazy. Kale salads. Kale chips. Kale smoothies. People went nuts for the leafy superfood, or, as chef-owner Matthew Kelly of Mateo Tapas in Durham, North Carolina, calls it, “the hipster vegetable.”

Joining the in crowd this season: cauliflower. “Cauliflower can be very luxurious or rustic,” says Kelly, a Costco member, who grills cauliflower and serves it in a traditional tomato sauce at Mateo. “People are treating it as an integral part of the dish.” Which is no surprise when you consider the versatility of the vegetable. Whether you fry it, grill it, mash it or roast it, the humble cauliflower should find its way to your table.

The basics

Unlike many seasonal vegetables, cauliflower (a member of the brassica family, which includes broccoli, cabbage, kale and Brussels sprouts) is available year-round in most of the U.S. The annual plant populates by seed, producing a head (the edible portion) closely resembling broccoli, sans the flower buds. While traditional white cauliflower is most common, adventurous eaters should keep an eye out for other varieties, such as ‘White Magic,’ ‘Absolute,’ ‘Incline’ and ‘Symphony,’ which come in colors such as orange, green and purple.

Cauliflower is low in fat and carbs, and high in fiber, folic acid and vitamin C. More good news: Cauliflower contains many cancer-fighting compounds. In fact, high cauliflower consumption has been linked to lower risks of breast, prostate and colon cancer.

Selection success

“When choosing cauliflower at the store, look for nice white florets, void of dark or brown spots,” says Sandy Cleary, vice president of club stores and alternative channels for Apio Inc., a Costco supplier. Heads surrounded by green leaves are often fresher because of the protection. Size does not

denote quality, although avoiding small florets is recommended.

Important to note: Buying bags of florets is an efficient choice. Not only is the cauliflower pre-cut, pre-washed and ready to use, but by providing only the florets, the supplier can compost the core and leaves rather than throwing them out, which is great for the planet, explains Cleary. Keep in mind that one whole head of cauliflower is equal to 1 pound of pre-cut florets.

Storing secrets

Cauliflower is best stored refrigerated (34 to 36 F) in a closed container, says Cleary. Fresh heads can remain fresh for up to a week, while pre-cut florets should be eaten within a couple of days. If you’re unable to go through the entire bag before it expires, simply blanch the remaining florets and freeze them for later, suggests Cleary. “We recommend using the frozen florets within a year of freezing for the best flavor and texture.”

Prepping points

If you’re working with a whole head of cauliflower, remove the outer leaves and thick stalk and cut the florets into uniformly sized pieces to ensure even cooking. You can eat the florets raw or cook them. The most popular cooking method is roasting, which brings out the nutty flavor of the cauliflower, says Cleary, who suggests adding extras such as garlic, pine nuts and Parmesan cheese.

Cauliflower is often used as a substitute for potatoes and rice, as it has a similar texture, but without the starch. Try adding cooked florets to mashed potatoes, or swapping out flour for mashed cauliflower in pizza crust. Boiling cauliflower can make it mushy and flavorless, not to mention devoid of nutrients, so don’t be afraid to get creative with new techniques. ☑

Kate Parham is an Atlanta-based food, wine and travel writer and recipe developer for more than 65 publications.



DEBORAH DENKER

► Canadian Cauliflower Cheddar Cups

12 slices Canadian bacon
2 cups cauliflower florets
2 tablespoons light sour cream
1 tablespoon fresh parsley
1 tablespoon green onion
Salt and pepper to taste
½ cup grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 375 F. Very lightly grease a 12-cup mini-muffin pan. Line each cup with

a slice of Canadian bacon. On the stovetop, steam cauliflower until very soft. Transfer cauliflower to a bowl and mash it. Add sour cream, parsley, green onion, and salt and pepper to taste, and mix well.

Fill Canadian bacon cups with cauliflower mixture. Top each cup with cheddar cheese. Bake for 15 minutes. Makes 12 mini-cups.

The Costco Connection

Pre-cut, pre-washed cauliflower florets can be found in the produce section of most Costco warehouses.