

New Burpee line boosts nutrients with local plant sources



The Burpee Boost Collection.

*Here's a story I wrote about **Burpee Boost** plants, a line of vegetables bred to have higher nutrients than standard varieties. You can get the seeds or plants from Burpee, but a few local nurseries will be carrying the plants ([here's a link](#))*

One of the many advantages of gardening is picking fresh, healthy produce. Vegetables harvested from your own garden plot will always be better for you than anything from the grocery store.

Now W. Atlee Burpee & Co. has upped the ante by introducing a line a vegetables bred to have even higher amounts of nutrients than standard varieties. Burpee Boost is a collection of six vegetables.

"We knew there was a need out there for higher nutrition vegetables," said Chelsey Fields, Burpee's vegetable product manager.

Using conventional breeding techniques, her team created healthier vegetables that also taste good. The results are standard hybrid varieties, not genetically modified organisms. Ms. Fields trialed all six varieties in the field and with the help of many Burpee employees selected the winners.

'Cherry Punch' has 30 percent more vitamin C and 40 percent more lycopene than the average tomato. It stays compact with a trailing habit. The cherry tomatoes are early, too, ready 48 days after planting. A half cup delivers 90 percent of the recommended daily vitamin C dose.

"It's great for containers, indeterminate and fruits prolifically," says Ms. Fields. "It's not difficult to get kids to have their nutrition when it's the vegetables they already like to eat, like cherry tomatoes."

'Power Pop' tomato puts on smaller tomatoes than 'Cherry Punch' but is three days earlier and also works for containers such as hanging baskets. The tomato offers 55 percent more lycopene and 40 percent more carotenoids than standard tomatoes.

'Solar Power' has the largest plant habit of the three. It's best planted in the garden or very large containers. Of the three varieties, this golden orange tomato produces the biggest fruits, weighing 4 ounces. It has a creamy texture and provides three times the beta carotene of standard tomatoes.

"Color is usually pretty indicative of nutritional value," says Ms. Fields, and the new cucumber 'Gold Standard' bears that out. This variety can grow in a wide range of conditions and does well whether grown in California or Pennsylvania. It's also prolific, setting lots of fruit on 6-foot vines. The flesh is golden and has five times the normal amount of beta carotene than most cucumbers.

"I love this cucumber," Ms. Fields says, noting that has an almost nutty flavor.

'Sweet Heat' pepper, meanwhile, has a tiny bit of heat for a finish but starts out tasting sweet. It has 65 percent more vitamin C than most peppers.

Burpee's 'Healing Hands Salad Mix' is four greens combined in one pelletized seed for easier planting. Each packet has 20 pellets. The greens have 20 percent more lutein and 30 percent more beta carotene than an average salad. The cucumber and salad mix are available as seeds only; the others can be purchased as either seeds or plants from Burpee. "One of the advantages of the Boost Collection is a lot of gardens are getting smaller. This is a good way to get your nutrition without needing as many plants," Ms. Fields says.

Leslie Bonci, director of sports nutrition at the UPMC Center for Sports Medicine, agreed.

"We know people don't eat enough vegetables. If we can optimize what is in the vegetables, we are still ahead of the curve."

Ms. Bonci has some tips for getting the most out of garden vegetables. She recommends lightly grilling or sauteing them.

"Adding that little bit of oil actually makes some the nutrients more available to the human body," she said.

It's also a good way to win over people who aren't huge vegetable fans.

There are other varieties that have been bred or discovered to have higher nutrients. 'Health Kick' tomato has 50 percent more lycopene than most tomatoes, and 'Caro Rich' and 'Double Rich' tomatoes were bred for higher nutrients. There are many carrots bred for higher beta carotene like 'Healthmaster,' 'Ingot' and a purple variety called 'Beta Sweet.'

Ms. Bonci adds that vegetables shouldn't be relegated to dinner. Think lunch and breakfast, too.

"Taking those tomatoes that we have in abundance and using them fresh as a salsa on our eggs -- why not?"

Burpee Boost plants are available locally at Bedner Greenhouse, 315 Coleman Road, McDonald.
Information: www.burpee.com or 1-800-888-1447.