



## Wonder food from our farms

**W**ant an all-natural wonder food that seems to reduce the risk of cancer, may reverse heart vessel damage caused by diabetes and help stem the effects of chronic lung disease? Want that same natural product to deliver big doses of Vitamins A and C plus lots of potassium and magnesium, those essential building blocks of life?

If the answer is yes, then you need look no further than the fresh vegetable counters of your local food market. That wonder product is broccoli, especially Ontario-grown broccoli.

A tasty treat when lightly steamed or added to stir fries, broccoli has come into its own as a powerful natural preventative, say experts such as Dr. Vlad Vuksan, a professor of nutrition at the University of Toronto's medical school and a research specialist at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

"All the research into broccoli's health benefits are promising to date," he says. "Broccoli seems to have wonderful properties to maintain health." Research suggests it benefits the heart and lungs and certainly helps individuals with diabetes maintain blood sugar at safe levels.

"More than that, it also contains a high level of nutrients." Broccoli does indeed pack a powerful health punch — and with just 50 calories per 100-gram serving, it keeps waistlines slim.

"What I do and what I recommend is combine broccoli with other great vegetables, all steamed or stir-fried lightly, not boiled," Dr. Vuksan says. "At least three times a week I will have broccoli, cabbage and maybe a carrot or zucchini for dinner.

"The combination tastes great and is great for your health." Happily, the people of Ontario have access to fresh-grown broccoli both in-season from local farmers and off-season through imports from places such as California and even Peru. But locally grown tops the taste and health benefits lists, says Don Almas, a Hamilton farmer and spokesperson for the Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario.

He raises both cauliflower and broccoli and ships the produce mainly to supermarkets, although he says demand from local farmers, markets and specialty vegetable stores are fast-growing.

"Ontario farmers have maybe 5,000 to 6,000 acres under cultivation for broccoli each year and raise about 30,000 tons," he says. "Harvest runs from early summer right through to late November many years.

"No question we could sell more if the season was longer. People are fast catching on that fresh broccoli is almost a wonder vegetable."

How wonderful? Diabetes, the medical journal, says there is a "dietary activator" in broccoli that could prevent a whole range of what it calls biochemical dysfunctions. A United Kingdom study says a sulfur compound in its green flowers may reverse the damage diabetes can do to the heart's blood vessels, and Johns Hopkins researchers say it could actually help men and women with chronic lung disease breathe easier.

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