



# HEALTHY HACKS FOR 2023

## April

## BETTER LIVING FOR TEXANS

### TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE

### Enjoy vegetables in a variety of ways!

Many can clearly picture the scene as someone (maybe even you!) wrinkles their nose to a certain food group in front of them. Any guesses on what food group it could be? A safe guess would indeed be the vegetable group. Some may assume that if they try and dislike a vegetable once, they will *never* enjoy that vegetable prepared another way. While everyone has different food preferences, it might be time to try the vegetable prepared differently. Fortunately, there are many ways to enjoy!



#### Raw, Roasted, Sautéed

For an easy snack, enjoy raw veggies and dip. Baby carrots, sugar snap peas, and bell peppers are sweet and involve little prep work to take for on-the-go. Hummus or plain Greek yogurt with your favorite spice mix make a tasty dip for vegetables. Create a full meal with just one pan by roasting veggies like broccoli, sweet potatoes, and Brussels

sprouts alongside a protein like chicken. It's an easy clean up plus a tasty dinner!

Sautéing uses heat to cook food in a shallow pan, like a skillet. Green beans, summer squash, and zucchini sauté nicely. *Check out this month's recipe featuring sautéed asparagus!*

Vegetables enjoyed in a variety of ways like the ones listed above will have nutritional values that slightly vary between different preparation methods. When cooking, try to limit frying or using heavy cream-based sauces. Eating more vegetables each day is what matters most!

#### Grow Your Own Vegetables!

The climate in most locations across Texas is great for growing vegetables in your yard or in a container garden year-round! You can grow vegetables from seed or transplants. Transplants will shorten the growing time in your garden and can be purchased from your local nursery or retail store. For help locating, prepping, and establishing a garden site, check with your local county extension agent to learn more about seasonal vegetables and for recommendations on which varieties grow best in your area.

Written by: Lindsey Breunig-Rodriguez, Project Specialist – Better Living for Texans  
Content Source: MyPlate Tip Sheet: Vary Your Veggies  
Photo From: Microsoft Office



## **BETTER LIVING FOR TEXANS** **TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE**

I am beyond excited that it is finally APRIL!!!! With the weather going back and forth between freezing and 80 degrees, I'm ready to plant my garden and start playing in the yard. Planting flowers or vegetables, mowing the yard, weeding, and planting new flowers are all great ways to increase your activity level. Remember, the USDA recommends kids and teens get at least 60 minutes of activity daily, while adults and older adults need at least 150 minutes weekly. Plus, if you bring in soil, or moving bags of soil or lawn clippings, you might be able to add in weight training, those bags are heavy.

Remember, if the bags are too heavy, get some help. Find a loved one, a neighbor, or pour part of it in a different container and make extra trips. Playing in the garden is fun...throwing your back out, is not.



Figure 1 Picture by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Now that the safety message is completed, let's talk about vegetables. Our Tarrant County Home Horticulture Agent, Brittney Meyer recommends planting after Easter.

"Easter is just a general guideline and an easy day to remember. Early April is a great time to plan to add transplants out in the garden. With our changing weather and climate, always watch the weather





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in case North Texas has a late freeze in April. North Texas frost dates are November 14 and March 21,” states Meyer. That way we are not trying to run outside every night and cover vegetables before frost comes in.

It’s time to plant, but what should you plant? Harold Annis, a Tarrant County Master Gardener notes, “Plant what you or your family likes to eat. Some



*Figure 2 Picture by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension*

vegetables do not do well in the North Texas climate and soil. However, choosing the right variety of the vegetable you want to grow will make a big difference in your success. There is a complete listing of vegetable varieties that do well in North Central Texas at [https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg\\_variety/](https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg_variety/). You will have better luck finding these varieties at local garden centers. The key to success is to pick varieties that suit your plant location and provide high quality soil. Vegetables that do well from plants that you purchase include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and cold crops, such as broccoli and cabbage. Plants that do well from seed include corn, peas, beans, lettuce, spinach and squash.”

I’ll be planting peppers, tomatoes (both slicing and cherry), spinach, carrots, beets, kale, and even blackberries. My dad drove down some blackberries from his garden in Missouri. I’m



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Figure 3 Picture by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

super excited to grow them and start grazing! I'm not a huge fan of kale, but my son's Russian tortoise and my daughter's bearded dragon both eat kale multiple times a week. I cannot wait to tell the kids to go pick their animal's dinner. I might plant something else, but a lot will depend on how the transplants look.

I tried to start my veggies from seeds, but when I took my kids to the Houston Stock Show and Rodeo, I forgot to get someone to water the seedlings. They do not look healthy now. That's ok. It was my first year. I learned several valuable lessons. The biggest lesson is to start early! I didn't start early enough. I think I will start in January next year. The next lesson was to add an oscillating fan to help the plants grow stronger and not have thin stocks. Apparently, I was making the environment too perfect, and they need a challenge to be strong. Another great lesson is water, water, water. This should be self-explanatory, but I didn't water enough when I was home, let alone when I forgot them when we went to Houston. Light is another big factor. The building of my home did a great job of keeping natural light away to help with my energy bills. However, this is not successful for plants in my house. I had to keep them close to the





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windows (and away from the cats). I added grow lights I stole from my other house plants and that helped, but it wasn't great. I'll have to figure this out for next year.

Making a map or layout of the garden is important once you decide what you're planting. Annis recommends, "Map out your garden plot so you know where you will plant each vegetable type. Place crops according to their mature size; don't crowd the plants. By doing a plan you will save space for the vegetables that are planted later such as southern peas and okra. If you are gardening in a raised bed where you do not have defined rows, it is best to place the tall vegetables on the north side of the garden."

We are now ready to plant our gardens. Once you get done reading this newsletter, and signing up for classes you want to attend, go out and start your garden. Even if it's one small pot on your porch. It's a great experience, gives you a source of food (if you plant vegetables instead of flowers), and hopefully will put a smile on your face each time you see that beautiful plant. Send me a picture of your gardens. I would love to see them!

Sanci Hall is the Tarrant County Better Living for Texan's Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent. Contact her at [sanci.hall@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:sanci.hall@ag.tamu.edu) & visit our webpage: [tarrant.agrilife.org](http://tarrant.agrilife.org) and [agrilife.org/urbantarrantnutrition/blt](http://agrilife.org/urbantarrantnutrition/blt)



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**Vegetable Highlight – Dried Fruit**



Figure 4 Photo by Leilah B. Keller 4-H, Intermediate

I'm sure most of you are looking at this beautiful picture that a 4-H youth sent me and thinking...this isn't fruit, its trail mix. Yes, you're correct, it is. But, it has dried fruit in it.

Dried fruit is a great source of nutrition. They are high in fiber and carbohydrates and low in fat. However, since the moisture is removed from the fruit, the dried forms are more calorically dense than their fresh counterparts.

Commercially dried fruits are usually treated with sulfur dioxide to help retain color. Most fruits have sugar added during the drying process or are coated with sugar, so be sure to read the nutrition label. If you find a good sale, you can always dehydrate your own fruit.

I love to carry around trail mix in my car and purse. I like to snack and it's hard to find inexpensive and healthy snack options if you don't plan ahead. Sometimes I buy pre-packed trail mixes. I typically like the ones without chocolate, so I don't worry about it melting if left in my





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car. But I LOVE going to a store that sales bulk items and making my own trail mix. It’s a great way to add some variety into the mix and try new ingredients. I use a small snack bag and a tablespoon or teaspoon to measure out the fruit, nut, or seed. I typically make about 14 bags when I do this. Some of my favorite items to add are below. If you find yourself interested in doing this, I'd love to know what new food you put in your trail mix.

**TRIAL MIX**  
**INGREDIENTS**

	<p><b>DRIED FRUIT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raisins</li> <li>• Cranberries</li> <li>• Blueberries</li> <li>• Currant</li> <li>• Apricots</li> <li>• Prunes</li> <li>• Figs</li> <li>• Cherries</li> <li>• Goji Berries</li> <li>• Bananas</li> </ul>		<p><b>NUTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almonds</li> <li>• Pecans</li> <li>• Cashew</li> <li>• Macadamia</li> <li>• Walnuts</li> <li>• Brazil</li> <li>• Hazelnut</li> <li>• Pine Nuts</li> <li>• Pistachios</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SEEDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pumpkin</li> <li>• Sunflower</li> </ul>		<p><b>OTHERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peanuts (legumes)</li> <li>• Chocolate chips</li> <li>• Coconut flakes</li> <li>• Cereal</li> <li>• Seasonings</li> </ul>



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**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Observes Stress Awareness  
Month with Nature**

Stress Awareness Month is observed to promote the importance of coping positively with and reducing stress. An accumulation of stress over years can lead to chronic stress and this affects our bodies negatively.

When we are stressed, our body naturally releases hormones that signal our heart rate and breathing to increase. Though, over time, chronic stress continually releases hormones that prevent our bodies from returning to a normal heart rate and normal breathing. An increase in heart rate can lead to an increase in blood pressure and blood sugar in our bodies as the liver releases more sugar, increasing the risk of Type 2 diabetes. Stress also causes our blood vessels to constrict which increases blood pressure.

Something that can reduce stress can be found all around us in nature. Spending time in green spaces, like parks, gardens, woodlands, and forests or blue spaces, like rivers, lakes, wetlands, and beaches can have a great impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. The benefits of nature do not only include the outdoors. When we don't have access to beautiful





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outdoor surroundings, nature videos or sounds that depict plant and animal wildlife have been shown to reduce stress. Of course, doing activities outdoors has the most impact. According to the American Psychological Association, “people who spent at least two recreational hours in nature during the previous week, reported significantly greater health and well-being.”

Stress can appear in our bodies in a variety of ways, like feelings of worry or frustration, changes in energy or appetite, trouble concentrating or sleeping, headaches, neck and back pain, or stomach problems. When we feel the effects of stress on our bodies, Extension Program Specialist for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Julie Tijerina recommends we enjoy some time in nature. Tijerina states that “spending as little as 10 minutes outdoors can have a tremendous benefit on our health by reducing blood pressure, decreasing blood sugar levels, lowering stress, and achieving an overall positive mood.”

Tijerina suggests the following to help cope with the effects of stress:

- Gardening: Spending at least 20 minutes in the garden has been shown to improve wellbeing by increasing our physical activity, reducing stress, and lowering blood pressure.
- Connecting: Nature offers many opportunities for connection to the surrounding environment through our senses. Simple practices such as listening to birds singing, smelling flowers,



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touching the soil with your hands and feet, feeling the warmth of the sun, or gazing at the stars can help bring a feeling of peace and calmness.

- Being Outdoors: Observing natural elements for 10-30 minutes, without distractions, can help decrease heart rate, cortisol levels (which increase sugar levels in our body), blood pressure, and can promote an overall feeling of being calm, refreshed, and restored.
- Green Exercise: Walking or exercising outdoors for 10 – 30 minutes helps reduce stress, heart rate, cortisol levels, and blood pressure.

Taking the time to unwind outdoors has many health benefits and is an integral way to reduce stress. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offers programming to fit your community's needs. These programs include gardening, walking, additional programs on stress for adults and youth, cooking classes for people with diabetes or high blood pressure and more! For more information on programming for adults and youth contact your local Tarrant County Extension office 817-884-1945.

#### Resources:

1. How Stress Affects Your Body – <https://www.stress.org/how-stress-affects-your-body>
2. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHAW21-Nature-research-report.pdf>. Mental Health Foundation. (2021). Nature. How connecting with nature benefits our mental health
3. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02942/full>. Minimum Time Dose in Nature to Positively Impact the Mental Health of College-Aged Students, and How to Measure It: A Scoping Review, *Front. Psychol.*, 14 January 2020, Volume 10 - 2019
4. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827321002093>. Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *SSM - Population Health*, Volume 16, December 2021, 100934

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5. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>. American Psychological Association. (2020, April 1). Nurtured by nature. Monitor on Psychology, 51(3).
6. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827321100293>. Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta analysis. SSM - Population Health, Volume 16, December 2021, 100934,
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6334070/>. Thompson R. Gardening for health: a regular dose of gardening. Clin Med (Lond). 2018 Jun;18(3):201-205. doi: 10.7861/clinmedicine.18-3-201.



TEXAS A&M  
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**Junior Master Gardener**  
growing good kids.

### TEACHER JUNIOR MG TRAINING

**JULY 12, 2023 9AM-3PM**

Learn about the Junior Master Gardener Curricula and how to set up your school has succeed with this programs. A complete lesson plan put together by teachers for teachers!

#### WHAT TO EXPECT

- Overview of JMG Curricula
- Hands-on examples
- Lunch provided!
- Texas A&M Agrilife certification with 8TEA CPE hours & TEEAC creditCEUs!

#### LOCATION:

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office  
200 Taylor St. Fort Worth, Tx 76196  
Lonestar A&B Conference Center

If you need any special accommodations, please contact the office at 817.884.1945 by July 7, 2023 so we may consider your request.

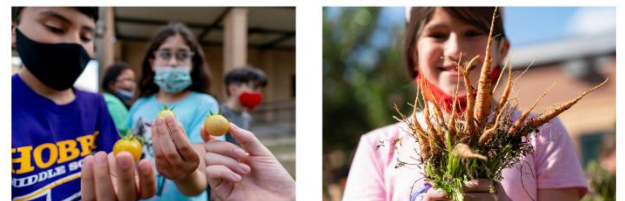
Save the Date!

Cost \$25

Contact Person:

Brittney Meyer - MGV  
817.884.1945

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TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

### LGEG TEACHER TRAINING

Learn, Grow, Eat, and Go Curriculum Training

**JULY 13, 2023**

**9AM - 4PM**

TARRANT COUNTY AGRILIFE OFFICES - DOWNTOWN

REGISTRATION COST: \$50  
**SAVE THE DATE!**  
LUNCH INCLUDED

"TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND PROGRAM PROVIDER. THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURTS OF TEXAS COOPERATING"

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**Local Events**

- **Adult Gardening Series - Growing and Nourishing Healthy Community Gardens.**  
Learn how to: Choose A Garden Location, Soil and Compost, Raised Bed and Container, Maintaining Your Garden, Diseases and Insects, and Harvesting Your Garden
  - **Community Enrichment Center**, 6250 NE Loop 820, North Richland Hills, 76180 in the Community Room form 10 am – 11 am.
    - Wednesday, June 7, 2023
    - Wednesday, July 5, 2023
    - Wednesday, Aug 2, 2023
    - Wednesday, Sept 6, 2023
    - Wednesday, Oct 5, 2023
    - Wednesday, Dec 6, 2023
  - **North Richland Hills Centre**, 6000 Hawk Ave, North Richland Hills, Tx 76180, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm.
    - Wednesday, Sept 6, 2023
    - Wednesday, Sept 13, 2023
    - Wednesday, Sept 20, 2023
    - Wednesday, Sept 27, 2023
    - Wednesday, Oct 4, 2023
    - Wednesday, Oct 11, 2023
    - Sign up online at [www.nrhcentre.com](http://www.nrhcentre.com), Class #18765





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- **Watauga Public Library**, 7109n Whitley Road, Watauga, Tx 76148, 4:30 pm – 5:30 pm
  - Monday, September 11, 2023
  - Monday, September 18, 2023
  - Monday, September 25, 2023
  - Monday, October 2, 2023
  - Monday, October 9, 2023
  - Monday, October 16, 2023
  - Sign up at the Watauga Public Library at 817-514-5865.
  
- **Adult Nutrition Series – Get The Facts** - During this 4-part adult nutrition series, learn to be more confident at the grocery store, learn how nutrients affect your health, and how to read and understand the Nutrition Facts Label.
  - **Evergreen at Keller**, 501 Bourland Road, Keller, Tx 76248, 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm.
    - Thursday, May 11, 2023
    - Thursday, May 18, 2023
    - Thursday, May 25, 2023
    - Thursday, June 1, 2023
    - Please sign up at the Activities Sign Up Sheet book.
  - **North Richland Hills Centre**, 6000 Hawk Ave, North Richland Hills, Tx 76180, 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm.
    - Tuesday, June 6, 2023
    - Tuesday, June 13, 2023



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- Tuesday, June 20, 2023
- Tuesday, June 27, 2023
  - Sign up online at [www.nrhcentre.com](http://www.nrhcentre.com), Class #18766
- **Fort Worth Public Library**, 1001 Library Lane, Fort Worth, Tx 76109, 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm
  - Tuesday, September 26, 2023
  - Tuesday, October 10, 2023
  - Tuesday, October 3, 2023
  - Tuesday, October 17, 2023
    - Sign up at the front desk.
- **Adult Nutrition – Healthy Carbohydrates** – This 4 -part series dives into how carbohydrates work in the body, incorporating them into a simple plate, and finding the right amount to eat.
  - **Hurst Senior Activities Center**, 700 Heritage Circle, Hurst, Tx 76053, 1 pm – 2 pm.
    - Wednesday, August 2, 2023
    - Wednesday, August 9, 2023
    - Wednesday, August 16, 2023
    - Wednesday, August 23, 2023
    - Wednesday, August 30, 2023
    - Sign up at the Hurst Senior Activities Center at 817-788-7710





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- Watauga Public Library, 7109 Whitley Road, Watauga, Tx 76148, 4:30 – 4:30 pm.
  - Wednesday, August 2, 2023
  - Wednesday, August 9, 2023
  - Wednesday, August 16, 2023
    - Sign up at the Watauga Public Library at 817-514-5865
  - Wednesday, August 23, 2023
  - Wednesday, August 30, 2023
- **Saginaw Senior Center**, 633 W. McLeroy Blvd, Saginaw, Tx 76179, 10:30 am - 11:30 am
  - Thursday, September 21, 2023
  - Thursday, September 28, 2023
    - Sign up at the Saginaw Senior Center, 817-230-0459.
  - Thursday, October 5, 2023
  - Thursday, October 12, 2023





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- **Adult Walk, Gardening, and Nutrition Series – Eat What You Grow** - During this 6-week series, we will be walking, learning about gardening (Growing and Nourishing Healthy Community Gardens curriculum), and nutrition (Healthy Carbohydrates curriculum) utilizing an outdoor educational environment at Mind Your Garden.
  - Mind Your Garden, 3815 Timberline Drive, Fort Worth, Tx 76119, 8:30 am – 11:30 am
  - Sign up at <https://forms.gle/ynBXdvJNGTtVMxh87>
  - Monday, 25, 2023
  - Monday, June 1, 2023
  - Monday, June 8, 2023
  - Monday, June 15, 2023
  - Monday, June 22, 2023
  - Monday, June 29, 2023







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## **BETTER LIVING FOR TEXANS**

### **TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE**

### **Recipe of the Month**

*Recipe from Lindsey Breunig-Rodriguez, BLT Project Specialist*

#### **Stovetop Asparagus**

*Enjoy vegetables in a variety of ways. You can eat them raw, roasted, steamed, or sautéed. Choose these options more often than frying or using heavy sauces.*

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 pound fresh (about 1 bundle) or frozen asparagus
- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ - ½ teaspoon garlic powder



#### **Directions**

1. Rinse fresh asparagus with cool water.
2. Remove woody-end pieces of asparagus by cutting ends or snapping off the ends. Leave whole or cut asparagus spears into thirds.
3. Heat a large skillet on medium heat and add oil, asparagus, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Cover and cook for 8 to 10 minutes until asparagus is cooked to preferred tenderness. To prevent burning, stir frequently and add 1 to 2 tablespoons of water as needed.
4. Test for tenderness by removing one spear and poking the thickest part with a fork. If the fork slides in easily, the asparagus is ready.

**Nutrients Per Serving:** 60 calories, 3.5 g total fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 150 mg sodium, 5 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 2 g total sugar, 0 g added sugar, and 3 g protein.

**Total Cost:** \$\$\$\$

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