



Information about the Kentucky State University Cooperative Extension Program



## Nutrient-Dense Crops: Current Trends in the U.S.

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### Introduction and Background

- **Nutrient-dense crops** are rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants while maintaining **low calorie content**.
- The **demand for these crops has surged** due to increased health awareness, sustainability efforts, and food security concerns.
- In 2023, the U.S. saw a **15% rise in sales** of nutrient-dense produce, driven by plant-based diets and **functional nutrition trends** (USDA, 2023).



### Most Popular Nutrient-Dense Crops in the U.S.

- **Leafy Greens (Spinach, Kale, Swiss Chard):** Rich in vitamins A, C, and K, they support vision, bone health, and immunity. *Help reduce the risk of heart disease and cognitive decline.*
- **Berries (Blueberries, Blackberries):** High in antioxidants and fiber, they combat inflammation. *Linked to lower risks of cancer and diabetes.*
- **Legumes (Lentils, Chickpeas):** Excellent sources of protein, fiber, and iron. *Aid in managing blood sugar and reducing heart disease risk.*
- **Cruciferous Vegetables (Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower):** Contain sulforaphane, which has anti-cancer properties. *They lower the risk of certain cancers and support detoxification.*
- **Sweet Potatoes:** Loaded with vitamin A and fiber, they promote gut and eye health. *Help prevent vitamin A deficiency and support diabetes management.*

## Nutrient-Dense Crops Thriving in Kentucky

- ❖ In Kentucky, nutrient-dense crops like **leafy greens**, **sweet potatoes**, **sunflower seeds**, and **berries** are typically grown **outdoors**, with planting occurring in *early spring or late summer*, depending on the crop.
- ❖ Some crops, such as **leafy greens**, can also be cultivated **indoors** using **hydroponics** or **vertical farming**, allowing for *year-round production*.
- ❖ **Outdoor farming** is common for crops like **tomatoes**, **black beans**, and **brassicas (Ex. broccoli, cabbage)**, which are planted in *late spring and harvested in summer or fall*.

## Trends Shaping Crop Production

- ❖ **Regenerative Agriculture** – Boosting soil health for nutrient-rich crops.
- ❖ **Organic Farming** – Rising demand for pesticide-free produce.
- ❖ **Urban & Hydroponic Farming** – Year-round fresh food access.
- ❖ **Biofortification** – Crops enhanced with extra vitamins and minerals.
- ❖ **Farm-to-Table Movement** – Growing preference for fresh, local foods.



## Fuel Your Body with Nutrient-Dense Crops

Incorporating nutrient dense fruits and veggies into your diet can improve overall health, boost immunity, and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic diseases.

### Nutrition Tips

- Add spinach to your scrambled eggs
- Top your oatmeal with berries and nuts
- Swap white rice for sweet potatoes in your meals
- Try new sides like broccoli or cabbage
- Incorporate fresh veggies into stir fries or pasta dishes



## References

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