



August 28, 2010 – Toronto, Ontario

Home Grown

Have you ever tasted the flavor of something you grew yourself? I know Colin and Dan have let me know how great things are tasting from their gardens. My grape tomatoes are starting to ripen—I planted very late this year. But Paula and I shared a couple the other day and they tasted great. But I am who I am so it made me think about why we need to take supplements when we can eat fresh foods like that. One obvious reason is that the growing season is limited, and so we can't really eat what we grow 365 days a year, especially in Michigan. But even in season, here are two reasons why it's still important to supplement your diet.

Peak Picking

We pick when the food looks the best because we know it will taste great. But that doesn't mean all the nutrients are still there. Plants contain phytonutrients and antioxidants, which are great for our body because they help it function better. But the nutrient content might not be as great when we pick them as they were earlier. Looking at some types of tomatoes, the antioxidant content decreases when the tomato turns from green to red (1). This may be due to the oxidation of chlorophyll which decreases as the fruit turns red and uses the vitamin C in the tomato to do it. Further, some of the carotenoids such as lycopene decrease as the tomato continues to ripen on the vine (2).

The question is: exactly when is the optimal time to pick them for maximal nutrients? Maybe the question should be: why should we care? We're eating things for taste and flavor when we grow them ourselves. Do you want to eat green tomatoes every day just because they may have more vitamin C? Especially if you have to fry them to eat them—then you're loading up on fat.

Mineral Content

I've grown cherry tomatoes in the same location for eight years. I add soil and I add natural fertilizer. Do I add any of the major minerals to the soil? How about the 50 or so other trace minerals? Unless it's in the soil or the fertilizer mix, the answer is no. We add NPK in various combinations—nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, but usually, that's it. Plants can make phytonutrients and vitamins, but in the case of minerals if they aren't in the soil, they won't be in the foods. Research has shown that organically grown plants have higher mineral content, but whether that applies to what we grow ourselves in small plots hasn't been studied. We don't really know whether all the minerals are there or not.

The Bottom Line

I'm going to continue to grow cherry tomatoes every year, and I hope you'll grow whatever you like as well. The taste is great, and there's an intrinsic satisfaction in growing your own food. But I think it's also important to be sure we get all the nutrients our bodies need by taking a multivitamin-multimineral that contains whole-plant concentrates. Think of it as a nutritional insurance policy. You don't want to leave home without it.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

References:

1. J Agric Food Chem. 2002 Oct 23;50(22):6550-6.
2. Int J Food Sci Nutr. 2009 Dec;60(8):694-708.

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