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Meijer produce buyers keep school lunches fresh with fruit and veggie ideas

September 10, 2018

A new school year means the return to routine — and the challenge that goes along with that. Parents report that one task that tends to get long in the tooth quickly is keeping up with a menu of interesting school lunch ideas. Hectic schedules and daily chaos seem to zap creativity, leaving many to default to the same tired apple slices and celery sticks day after day.



The Meijer produce buyers have some suggestions for fun fruits and veggies that kids actually like that will help extend the shelf life of lunch plans.

Sugar Kiss melons: This California melon is the sweetest of the melon family and packs a punch of flavor, dissolving like sugar on your tongue. Say that magic word to your kids and watch how fast they eat it. It's a very versatile melon, too, because it pairs with a variety of other foods. Meijer suggests tossing together cooked soba noodles, cooked and diced chicken, Sugar Kiss melon slices, red Bell pepper slices, scallions, fresh cilantro and basil with rice vinegar and fresh lime juice.

Aloha pepper: This pretty, striped pepper is a unique variety that is a mix of an orange pepper and a red pepper. It pairs beautifully with citrus. Try mixing bite-sized chunks of pepper, mango, pineapple, papaya and cheese, or making mini kebabs with pepper, mango, cheese and turkey.

Angel Sweet grape tomatoes: Meijer said these little guys are so sweet, they will amaze you. Angel Sweet tomatoes don't need to be sliced up. Kids can just pop them into their mouths. Pair them with bite-sized chunks of cheese, turkey or chicken, and almonds.

Mini organic greenhouse cucumbers: Unlike larger cucumbers, the skin on mini cucumbers isn't bitter. It's the perfect, portable veggie. Plus, they'll hold their crunch in kids' lunchboxes, too. Mix them with seedless watermelon, and if your kids like it, feta cheese. It's a cool combination that provides kids with plenty of hydration. Hint: Look for the new "personal sized" watermelons. You'll have less waste than if you slice a big one.

Rainbow carrots: Baby orange carrots have been a staple in lunches for years. Surprise them with carrots that come in purple, white and yellow. Rainbow carrots are packed with antioxidants, and the novelty of colors makes them fun for kids. Pair sliced rainbow carrots with cheese or edamame for a crunchy, nutrient-filled lunch.

Sweetango apples: This juicy and delicious apple is the newest darling among apple lovers. It was developed at the University of Minnesota, which also brought us the popular Honeycrisp. Sliced apples tend to turn brown, so brush apples with a little lemon juice. These apples stay crisp and pair well with just about anything. Make your own, healthy “lunchable” with sliced apples, dried fruit, which is perfectly snackable, and sliced turkey spread with cream cheese and rolled up around a few leaves of spinach or lettuce and a slice of bell pepper.

I Control Kits: If you're sapped from packing those lunches day after day, Meijer's I Control Kits are pre-made, fresh lunches you can find in the produce area. They're filled with ready-to-eat options like diced cheese, turkey, veggies and dips, and sliced fruit. This is a great option if you're short on time.

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