

## GOOD FATS

By: Jacqui Bushee

Food styles are definitely moving toward healthier, purer food and consumers are much more aware of their impact on diet. Berries, nuts, salmon, olive oil, soy, flaxseeds, fruits and vegetables, of the organic variety, are a hot topic. We are also learning about fats, the good and the bad. Many people are under the assumption that avocados are high in fat. But the avocado is actually a fruit and contains very beneficial fat. They contain the monounsaturated fats, which are heart-healthy, can lower bad cholesterol (LDL), and maintain good cholesterol (HDL). An average avocado contains 5 fat grams, 3.2 grams of which are monounsaturated fat. Avocados are also low in sodium and have beneficial plant compounds such as alpha-carotene, lycopene and lutein, which act as nutrient booster allowing the body to absorb more beneficial plant compounds. By adding an avocado to a salad of lettuce, tomato and carrots, you increase the absorption of these compounds. (See [www.whfoods.org](http://www.whfoods.org)) Avocados are an excellent way to add green (phytochemicals) into the 5 A Day diets. They are a great source of folate, which is good for cell and tissue development in pregnant women, and high in potassium and fiber. They have 60% more potassium than bananas.

### Chef Tips

- ❖ To prevent browning of the avocado add an acid such as lemon or lime juice
- ❖ Avocados ripen quickly when placed in a brown paper bag and set in a warm place
- ❖ Avocados can be refrigerated for up to 5 days after ripening
- ❖ The Hass avocado's pebbly skin turns from green to nearly black when it is ripe
- ❖ If your recipe calls for just asparagus tips, save the stalks for soup
- ❖ If ridges form on the stems of asparagus, this is a sign of age and soaking in ice water will help revive it.

Today the California avocado is a Native American plant; the most popular variety of seven is the Hass. The avocado originated in south central Mexico, and was cultivated as early as 500 BC. The Aztecs considered them an aphrodisiac and they were originally called "aguacate". It was introduced in the U.S. in 1871 by Judge Ord of Santa Barbara, and today California is the leading producer of domestic avocados. A single tree can produce up to 60 pounds of fresh fruit each year.

Another great source of a "good fat", the omega-3 fatty acid kind, is the hot new fish tilapia. This fish has recently made its way to the fish case in a big way. It is both affordable and quite delicious. This fish is one of the safest and least endangered. (See [www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com)). Tilapia is native to Israel and Northern Africa, also known as St. Peter's fish and the first fish ever to be farmed by man. Raised in both outdoor and indoor ponds, they are not able to escape into rivers to compete with other fish. Tilapia feed on algae and plankton which helps to keep their water clean. They are warm water fish that are disease resistant, reproduce easily, and do not require antibiotics.

## Chef's Recipe

### Tuscan White Bean Soup

¼ cup of pancetta  
(or lean bacon) cut into a small dice  
2 tablespoons of olive oil  
1 large onion, roughly chopped  
3 cloves of garlic, minced  
3 ½ - 4 cups of chicken broth (or vegetable)  
4 cans of cannellini beans, drained and rinsed  
1 bag of fresh baby spinach  
(washed and de-stemmed)  
1 sprig of fresh rosemary  
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large dutch oven type pot cook pancetta over medium heat until just browned. Remove pancetta with slotted spoon and add olive oil to the rendered fat already in the pan from the pancetta.

Add onion and simmer until translucent; then add garlic and stir for less than 1 minute being careful not to burn; add beans and broth. Increase heat to simmer and put in rosemary sprig. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes. Discard rosemary after 20 minutes and put in spinach. After spinach is cooked, about 10 minutes., taste to see what seasoning is needed. Remove from heat and let stand.

With an emulsion blender (can be blended in a regular blender by putting a cup of the mixture into the blender at a time), blend until smooth. Serve with Parmesan cheese sprinkled on top.

Nutritionally, tilapia is high in protein, low in sodium and fat. Tilapia contains antioxidants, B complex vitamins and minerals, including calcium, iron and potassium. Extremely low mercury levels are due to its short life span because they don't eat other fish that may contain mercury. Tilapia is lean, boneless, white and flaky. Pan frying in canola oil is recommended because it is thin and may dry out if over baked or broiled.

## What's In Season?

This is the best time to enjoy asparagus. Local asparagus is grown in the western part of the state and is ready by May, but most asparagus comes from California. Asparagus is a perennial, and an almost leafless member of the lily family. Look for firm tips with a purple hue and dark green stems. Also, the stalks should be rounded, not fat nor twisted, and not too woody at the base. The long thin ones are best and need less trimming because they are so tender. If the stalks are heavy and thick they may have

to be shaved with a vegetable peeler. To trim, break off about 1-2 inches from the bottom, then trim evenly. White asparagus has a milder flavor than green and is buried under the soil when grown to prevent chlorophyll production. Use asparagus within a day or two for best flavor, and store in refrigerator with ends wrapped in a damp paper towel then placed in a plastic bag. Asparagus contains a high amount of vitamin K, Vitamin A and folate as well as vitamin C and is low in calories. It originated in the Mediterranean region almost 2000 years ago.

Roasted asparagus makes a great hors d'oeuvre, accompanied by roasted zucchini and Portobello mushrooms. Steamed asparagus can be served with light lemon vinaigrette and makes a great salad alone or tossed into a salad. Blanched asparagus cut on the diagonal can be tossed with pasta, olive oil and garlic. Asparagus is also great added to an omelet. The herbs thyme, tarragon and rosemary are great compliments to asparagus. To steam asparagus, you don't need a special asparagus steamer just use an inexpensive stainless steel basket type. Place the steamer in a deep sauté pan with water up to the bottom of the steamer, a tablespoon of lemon juice (to prevent discoloration) cover and let steam for 4-5 minutes. This water from the steaming makes a great stock if you are making a pan sauce.

Bon Appétit!