

YOGATM MAGAZINE

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YOGA
ROUTINE

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AYURVEDIC
HEALTH

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BENEFITS
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HEALTHY INFLUENCES OF THE SIX SEASONS OF AYURVEDA

Words: Vani Linda Bretherton

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Ayurveda divides the year into six seasons. They are spring(*vasant*), summer(*grishma*), rainy season(*varsha ritu*), autumn(*sharad*), winter(*hemant*) and late winter(*shishir*).

How we experience the seasons

The seasonal cycle is one of the most tangible examples we could have of being a part of a much greater living organism. Seasonal change and weather conditions profoundly affect all life on the planet, governing the growth of plant life, and thus animal life and the changing conditions of our global environment and the more immediate local surroundings that we live in.

Sunlight, temperature, humidity and rainfall in varying combinations form the basis for suitable living conditions for most life forms on the planet and our societies were founded on the availability of food in the locations we chose to live in.

Our metabolisms are keyed into our local environment.

Planes, trains and road transport can now bring us food from all over the world at all times of the year but we still cannot cheat the seasons.

Eating mangoes in Northern Europe during winter doesn't make it summertime!

The seasons unfold in an endless sequence on a global scale and we live through that continually changing context.

Changes to our bodies

Each season's climatic changes produce distinct shifts in our metabolism on a cyclical basis. The changes are good for our bodies because they provide opportunities for re-building and growth.

The first three seasons

Spring is a time for beginnings. Summer a time of celebrations, and the rainy season is a time to reflect and plan.

According to Ayurveda, these seasons are weakening for the physical body and for nature in general. We all know the effects of being in the sun for too long, it leaves us tired, depleted and takes away our strength. The sun and wind create a drying, and heating effect and the nurturing cooler qualities of the earth are depleted, while in this season the bitter, astringent, and pungent qualities develop.

In these seasons, Ayurveda advises us to eat foods from the sweet, sour and salty tastes spectrum to counteract this depleting effect.



We associate summer with holidays and excitement, and indeed it can be the perfect season for all kinds of activities. Crops are harvested and long summer days are beautiful to experience. Nevertheless, summer heat saps energy and depletes our reserves, which is why despite our love of the weather, we sit in the shade, plaster ourselves in sunscreen and drink lots of fluid.

The second three seasons

Autumn is a time for change, winter the time for gathering, Late winter is our time for quietness.

These seasons are considered strengthening for our bodies, the cooling energy of the moon becomes more powerful. Heat is relieved by the moist and cool elements. During these times, the body begins to slow down, replenish, be more nourished and the spiritual aspects of life are experienced more easily. It is advised to increase taste in your food by including pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes to counter balance with this seasons predominant tastes of the sweet, sour and salty.

The winter months are periods of recuperation from the gradually

increasing dryness and heat of the summer months, even in the more temperate climate of the UK, when cloud cover is often more frequent than blue skies. In winter, we gain strength and substance from the damper conditions, the slowing down of our metabolism and a gradual increase in the earth's water levels.

It's Not What People Expect

Not the balance of attributes some people might expect, we recuperate and gain strength throughout winter and expend that strength and energy during the summer.

The ability to eat food out of season is a luxury we have become accustomed to, yet in excess, it damages our bodies which live through their local season.

The seasons create demands on our bodies that can only be met by responding with seasonally appropriate nutrition and activity. We need to live sympathetically with cycles of seasonal change which are as central to being alive as any other sensory experience. That means learning to work with the six tastes on a day-to-day basis and learning to balance the phases of our activity over longer periods of time.

The rewards are vigour, health and strength and pleasure arising from harmony rather than struggle.

A Delicious Autumn Meal

This is a delicious early winter meal plan that will bring good quality healthy warming, comforting and healing energy during this early winter season.

Ingredients

2 cups of sweet potatoes, diced
1 cup of split red lentils
1 bunch of coriander, roughly chopped or dried
1 tbsp cumin seed
1 tbsp fennel seed
1 tbsp veg stock (low salt Bouillon)
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp ginger
1 pint water

If you are eating this as a main meal, serve with chunky bread and a bowl of green salad.

Directions

1. To make the masala paste, grind cumin and fennel seeds, ginger, turmeric and dry vegetable stock and salt. Finely chop coriander and put to one side (or if using ground coriander, add in with the other spices).
2. Add drops of water to the ground spice combination, mixing until a paste.
3. Fry this paste in a deep pan with a little vegetable ghee, or olive oil if you prefer. After a few minutes, add chopped sweet potatoes (chop to size according to how chunky you want the soup) and stir.
4. Add water into the pan in small amounts, watching to ensure the potatoes are soaking it up. Once soaked up, add more water until it is not being absorbed any more.
5. Add red lentils, these will soak up the water so you will probably need to add more (unless you added a little too much in the previous step).
6. Continue adding water until the soup is at the correct thickness.
7. Bring to the boil and then leave to simmer until your vegetables are cooked.
8. Add fresh chopped coriander and serve.

Kimbalaki Soffup

This is one of my favourite dishes which I learnt when I was training over 30 years ago at the Wise Earth Monastery. My students love it too.

This is a good dish for all doshas/ body constitutions.



Spiced Kichadi

Kichadi is the marriage of bean and grain and Ayurveda's iconic healing, cleansing nutritious dish.

Directions

Heat the oil very hot and tip in all the spices and allow to pop and infuse into oil for about two to three minutes. Add the onion or leeks and cook for a further three minutes, being careful not to let the contents burn, keep stirring. Add rice and beans and cook for further two minutes. Cover with three cups of veg stock and

bring to the boil – stir briefly and lower the heat, cover and cook for approx. 10-15 minutes until all the rice and lentils have soaked up the liquid. Keep the pan covered and stir occasionally – ensure that the rice and beans are cooked and don't stick. Some beans may need to be pre-soaked.

Ingredients

- 1 quarter cup of oil
- 1 cup basmati rice
- 1 cup lentils or mung beans
- 3 cups veg stock
- ½ onion or a small leek

Spices

- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon cardamom pods or less
- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon black pepper corns or less
- 1 tablespoon fennel
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves or less (half)
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 pinch saffron

Turmeric & Cumin Potatoes and yogurt are both great side additions to kichadi.

- 1 Large potato
- Sprinkle of turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- Olive oil

Dice the potatoes into small cubes – in a bowl combine the potatoes with the turmeric, cumin and oil – roast in the oven for 15-20 minutes.



Baked Stuffed Apple Breakfast

This is a huge favourite among the students and clients alike. Icecream or iced food are not encouraged in Ayurveda, particularly for anyone with digestive problems. But now and then, it's a treat. Or you could use a splash of cream.

Ingredients

30g chopped walnuts
600ml dairy free vanilla ice cream
2 tbsp dark brown sugar
100g whole-grain cereal with dried fruit (recommended: Muesli)
½ lemon
60g butter/nondairy butter, softened
4 green apples

Directions

Heat the oven to 210C/Gas Mark 7. In a medium bowl, combine the butter/non-dairy butter, cereal, sugar, and walnuts. Fill the apples with the cereal mixture. Set the apples upright in muffin tins and bake until tender and bubbly, about 20 to 30 minutes depending on the size of the apples



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