



## April Celebrations

April is national gardening month and stress awareness month. These two celebrations have much in common. Gardening, especially vegetable gardening, provides many health benefits. Not only can it increase fresh produce consumption, but research also suggests that digging in the dirt has a positive impact on our microbiome—the healthy microorganisms that live in and on us, protect our health, and strengthen our immune system. Gardening has also been shown to be an effective stress reliever as it combines physical activity and exposure to nature and sunlight, both of which can reduce stress and support a positive mind-set. Planting a vegetable garden is a great way for the whole family to get outside and celebrate spring!

### Why Plant a Family Vegetable Garden?

Planting and tending to a vegetable garden, as a family, can be a great way to slow down and strengthen family bonds. Children can benefit in many ways, including:

- **Strengthen self-esteem.** The experience of planting seeds and watching them grow reinforces positive self-esteem. Kids gain a sense of responsibility and achievement by tending to plants as they see their hard work literally come to life.
- **Support learning abilities.** Gardening can help advance cognitive abilities. Tasks involved in growing plants can improve memory and help build sensory and motor skills. Working as a team also supports positive social skills.
- **Enhance curiosity.** Understanding how food is grown stimulates curiosity and increases a child's willingness to try new food. Kids will be excited to eat what they have grown—supporting a positive association with eating healthy foods.
- **Increase physical activity.** The process of gardening is very physical and involves many muscle-building activities such as digging, lifting, weeding, etc. As an added benefit, increased physical activity reduces stress!



## Upcoming Events

### Food Safety Training

**For information contact:**  
 Puwalski or Caleb Miller at  
 631-873-4775.

### Senior (60+) Food Distributions

Please call for income eligibility requirements and registration.  
 at: 631-873-4775.

### Nutrition Workshops

**Topic:** Fiber & Health  
**When:** April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 1:00 pm  
**Where:** Island Harvest  
 126 Spagnoli Rd., Melville



## Chronic Stress and Diet Quality...What's the Connection?

Prolonged or chronic stress is detrimental to health in many ways, including having a negative impact on nutrition. Here's one way the two are directly connected:

- During a stressful event, the body releases cortisol, a hormone (chemical messenger) that helps the body protect itself. Unfortunately, if cortisol levels stay high for a long period of time, such as during repeated and constant stressors, this can lead to increased food consumption, fat storage and weight gain.
- Research shows that stress can increase intake of food high in fat, sugar, or both, in other words low nutritional value, high calorie foods.

Addressing stress with healthy coping strategies is essential. See this month's Nutrition & Health Resource Center featured site "Mental Health America" for tips/support for addressing excessive or chronic stress.





## NUTRITION & HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER

### Family Gardening

This site provides gardening tips and activities for families and educators, as well as links to sites that can help families get started with vegetable gardening. Learn more here:

[Kids Gardening](#)



### Mental Health America

Mental Health America is the nation's leading national nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of mental health, well-being, and illness prevention. They provide information on mental health conditions, where to find help, advocacy opportunities and much more. Use this link to access their stress-level screening tool, as well as links to tips and support for addressing excessive or chronic stress: [Stress Screener](#)



## Spring Potato & Veggie Salad

This recipe uses some of the produce that is in-season in New York in the Spring. Local, seasonal produce often offers the best value in terms of flavor, nutritional content, and price.



### Ingredients

- 1-pound new potatoes, yellow or red, cubed
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 ½ tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp. chopped fresh dill (optional)
- 1 small, sweet or red onion, finely chopped
- ¾ pound asparagus
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 1 small bunch arugula (optional)
- Black pepper to-taste
- Pinch of salt (optional)

### Directions:

1. Clean potatoes; do not peel.
2. Place potatoes in medium-size pot and fill with cold water to cover then cover pot, boil potatoes, 10-15 minutes—check for doneness frequently; potatoes should not be too soft.
3. In a large bowl mix the oil, vinegar, and mustard.
4. Add dill and chopped onions to the bowl.
5. Wash and break the asparagus stems at point where the woody part meets the tender part, then cut into ½ inch pieces.
6. Remove tough stems from the arugula, then wash thoroughly to remove sand.
7. About 3-5 minutes before the potatoes have finished cooking, stir in the asparagus, and continue cooking. If you are using frozen peas; one minute before the potatoes are finished cooking, stir in the frozen peas.
8. Place arugula and fresh peas (if not using frozen peas) in bowl and toss with dressing.
9. Drain potatoes and cooked veggies and stir into bowl; mixing gently to coat with dressing and serve.