

Carrots:

Carrots were first grown in Central Asia and Middle Eastern countries for their aromatic leaves and seeds. Now their core, or taproot of the carrot plant is commonly eaten. There are many varieties of carrots that offer multiple different colors such as white, yellow, dark red, purple, and the most well-known color- orange. Orange carrots contain potassium, important for blood pressure control and cardiac and renal health. Orange carrots also have vitamin-A promoting alpha and beta carotene compounds that support healthy eyesight. Purple and red carrots contain more anthocyanin and lycopene. These powerful antioxidants have been linked to lower risks for certain cancers.

The ‘baby carrots’ that can be found in most grocery stores were started as an attempt to salvage aesthetically ‘ugly’ produce. The undesirable looking carrots are shaved down into 2-inch, convenient pieces. The carrots that are purchased this way and with other ‘fresh cuts’ present an increased risk for microbial cross-contamination. Because of this risk, they do undergo a minimal sanitation process prior to packaging. The minimal amount of chlorine-based solutions and other antimicrobial agents, as defined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, are used to ‘wash’ the vegetables before a thorough rinse prior to packaging. The amount of chlorine used for washing carrots is less than the amount found in regular tap water.

Carrots are affordable and easily accessible all year round. It’s the sixth most consumed fresh vegetable in the United States. They are best stored unwashed, in a tightly sealed container, in the coolest part of the refrigerator. If carrots do dry out and develop a ‘white blush’, they are still okay to eat. This filmy, white coating simply indicates dehydration. Soak your carrots in ice water to restore their color and texture.

When following a recipe, estimate that 1 large carrot will yield about 1 cup shredded or thinly diced. If purchasing in large quantities, expect 1 pound of carrots to provide 3 cups chopped, 2 ½ cups grated or 1 1/3 cups cooked or mashed carrots.

Try this apple carrot muffin recipe for a warm treat!

APPLE CARROT MUFFINS

Ingredients:

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups wheat flour
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups shredded apple
 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup shredded carrots
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
2 eggs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey or maple syrup
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup avocado oil (good for baking because of mild flavor)
1 tsp. of vanilla

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 350°F. Line or grease muffin tins.
- Mix dry ingredients well. Add in apple and carrot to the dry mixture and mix well.
- Mix liquid ingredients and add them to the dry mixture. Mix just enough to incorporate.
- Spoon into muffin tins. Bake for about 16 minutes.