Fresh vegetables taste great. Picked during season, they are budget and nutrition bargains. All fresh vegetables need is a little prep work and then they are ready to cook.

Fresh vegetables need to be washed thoroughly with cool running water. Use a brush for items grown in the ground, such as potatoes. Next, trim any blemishes or bad spots. Finally, cut the vegetables into pieces that are as close to the same size as possible. The uniform size will help the vegetables cook evenly.

Here are four tasty ways to vary your vegetables.

**Microwave**
Microwaves cook vegetables quickly. Cook and serve in the same dish for easy clean up.

Nearly every vegetable can be cooked in the microwave, from spinach to potatoes. Broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and string beans are just a few of the varied vegetables that a microwave can cook quickly.

Place the vegetable pieces into a microwave safe container. Add 2 tablespoons of water. Cover with a tight fitting lid. If the container does not have a lid, use a microwave safe plastic wrap to seal the bowl. Be sure to vent the bowl.

Cook on high for 5–7 minutes until crisp tender,
stopping midway through to stir. Be cautious removing the lid or wrap to avoid the
steam that builds up in the container.

Cook a few more minutes if the vegetables are not crisp-tender. More time is
needed for a larger amount of vegetables. Other vegetables such as potatoes
require more time.

Drain water from vegetables and season as desired.

**Roasted Vegetables**
Roasting vegetables in the oven creates a wonderful caramel flavor. Roasting
brings the sweetness of vegetables front and center.

Roasted potatoes often come to mind but there are many other options. Nearly
any root vegetable – sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, or turnips – can be
roasted. Roasted cauliflower is wonderful.

For easy clean up, line a baking pan with aluminum foil. Spray the foil with non-
stick spray.

Place the cut up pieces of vegetables into a bowl.

Drizzle a small amount of canola or olive oil over the vegetables (use about 1
tablespoon per 2 cups of vegetable pieces).

Mix to coat. Then arrange the pieces evenly on a baking sheet. If some pieces are
larger, place those toward the edges of the tray with the smaller pieces toward the
center.

If necessary, spray a light coating of non-stick olive oil spray over the tops of the
pieces to coat any that do not have a slight film of the oil.
Place in a 425 °F oven in the middle or lower rack position. Roasting times will vary depending on the vegetable. Starchy vegetables and larger pieces will take more time than smaller pieces of water-rich vegetables such as peppers. Start checking the vegetables after 15 minutes. In general, allow about 30 minutes.

Roast until the pieces are tender and are a caramel brown color around the edges. Some pieces may have edges that appear dark brown or blackened (slightly charred). This is normal and adds to the flavor. Remove from oven before all pieces are dark brown or charred.

Put vegetables in a serving bowl and serve immediately.

Roast extra vegetables. Chill thoroughly and refrigerate for use in pasta or grain-based salads the next day.

**Pan Steamed/Stir-fry**

Use a large non-stick pan to steam pieces of vegetable until they are tender and tasty.

Place uniform pieces of vegetables in a pan with a shallow layer of water across the bottom, about 1/4 of an inch deep.

Heat over medium to medium-high heat. Cover the pan with a lid to cook faster. Cook vegetables to crisp-tender. Check at 5 minutes for doneness. Continue to check every 2–3 minutes until crisp-tender.

Drain the water and then return to heat. Add a small amount of cooking oil and stir to coat pieces. Continue to stir while pieces turn a golden brown. Add seasonings, such as minced garlic or herbs, as desired.

Remove from heat and serve immediately.
Option: Stir-Fry in Sauce

Instead of water, use low sodium broth to make an easy sauce for vegetables. Follow directions for pan steaming except do not drain the broth when vegetables are crisp-tender. Add another 3/4 cup of broth to cooked vegetables and heat.

While broth is heating, mix 1 tablespoon of cornstarch to 1/4 cup of cold broth until dissolved. Add to the hot broth and vegetables in skillet and stir to mix.

Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Cook until the liquid appears thickened and clear. Serve over noodles or brown rice.

Sauté
A non-stick pan is a must-have tool in the kitchen. Use the pan to sauté vegetables in a small amount of oil.

Heat the pan over medium to medium-high heat. Add a small amount of oil to the pan, just enough to coat the bottom surface. Add vegetable pieces to the pan and stir frequently. Cook until vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes.

Here are four recipes sure to please everyone at the table.
Italian herbs and cheese give broccoli a tasty flavor twist.

**Broccoli with Herbed Cheese**

3 cups of fresh broccoli florets, washed and trimmed  
2 ounces, shredded lowfat mozzarella cheese (1/4 cup)  
Italian Herb seasoning (mixture of dried basil, oregano, parsley and other herbs)

Place broccoli in microwave-safe container. Add 2 tablespoons of water. Cover and microwave on high for 7 minutes, stirring at 3 1/2 minutes. Remember to vent container when using plastic wrap.

Remove from microwave and open lid away from you to vent steam. Carefully drain liquid.

Sprinkle shredded cheese evenly over broccoli. Sprinkle lightly with Italian Herbs. Cover and cook for 1–2 minutes until cheese melts.

Serve immediately. Makes about five 1/2 cup portions.

Nutrition information per serving: 53 calories, 4.5 grams protein, 2.5 grams fat, 4 grams carbohydrate, 6 milligrams cholesterol, 78 milligrams sodium, 1.4 grams fiber, 108 milligrams calcium, 4 milligrams iron, 399 IU Vitamin A, and 49 milligrams vitamin C.
Prepare cauliflower this way once and you may never go back to steamed.

**Oven-roasted Cauliflower**

1 large head of cauliflower, cleaned and divided into individual florets; cut each floret in half to create flat surface  
2 tablespoons olive or canola oil  
Non-stick cooking spray (try a flavored sprays such as olive oil roasted garlic)

Line a baking sheet with foil; coat foil with oil. Arrange pieces, flat side down on the baking sheet.

Rub the flat surface of pieces to coat the cut flat surface with oil.

Place in a 400 °F oven on the lower rack. Roast for 25–30 minutes, until browned around edges and tender. Start checking after 15 minutes roasting time. Allow a dark brown color to develop and fork tender doneness before removing from oven.

Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper if desired. Transfer to a serving bowl, and watch the florets disappear! Makes about eight 1/2 cup servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 56 calories, 2 grams protein, 3.5 grams fat, 6 grams carbohydrate, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 32 milligrams sodium, 2.6 grams fiber, 23 milligrams calcium, .5 milligrams iron, 13 IU vitamin A, and 48 milligrams vitamin C.
Pan steam vegetables first, then lightly stir-fry for a lower calorie option to traditional stir-fry.

Garlicky Green Beans – Pan Steamed and Stir Fried

2 cups of fresh green bean, washed and trimmed
1 tablespoon olive oil
1–2 cloves of minced garlic, to taste

Place green beans in a large nonstick skillet with a full surface of water (about 1/4 inch deep). Cover and heat over medium to medium-high heat for 5–7 minutes.

When beans are crisp-tender, remove pan from heat and open lid away from you to vent steam. Carefully drain liquid.

Return pan to heat and drizzle oil over beans. Add garlic and stir continuously to brown garlic and beans. Season with a slight sprinkle of salt and pepper if desired.

Serve immediately. Makes about four 1/2 cup portions.

Nutrition information per serving: 49 calories, 1 gram protein, 3.5 grams fat, 4 grams carbohydrate, 6 milligrams cholesterol, 78 milligrams sodium, 2 grams fiber, 23 milligrams calcium, .6 milligrams iron, 380 IU Vitamin A, and 9 milligrams vitamin C.
Sauté peppers and onions in a non-stick skillet with a small amount of oil. The flavor is fabulous – salt and pepper not needed.

**Tri-Pepper and Onion Sauté**

1 each red, yellow, and orange bell pepper, seeded and cut into thin strips
1 large sweet onion (Vidalia, Maui or Walla Walla), thinly sliced
Canola or olive oil, about 2 tablespoons, enough to coat surface of skillet

Heat large non-stick skillet for 3–4 minutes over medium to medium-high heat. Add oil and rotate pan so oil coats surface. Add pepper and onion slices and stir to coat with oil. Continue to stir every 30 seconds or so to keep mixture from sticking to pan. Cook until the onions are translucent and peppers are soft. For more flavor, cook longer to develop a brown color.

Remove from heat and serve immediately.

Makes about six 1/2 cup portions.

Try the mixture wrapped in tortillas with shredded cheese and black beans for an easy main dish meal.

Nutrition information per serving: 83 calories, 1 gram protein, 5 grams fat, 10 grams carbohydrate, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 7 milligrams sodium, 1.6 grams fiber, 20 milligrams calcium, .6 milligrams iron, 980 IU Vitamin A, and 151 milligrams vitamin C.