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# Five Exotic Veggies You're Missing



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By: 07/20/2016

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# FIVE EXOTIC VEGGIES

## You're Missing

By Sarah Alban

*Reviewed by Katie Robinson, MA, RD, LD*

It can be tricky finding interesting new ways to eat well.

These five exotic, healthful veggies are extremely versatile and provide new ways to enjoy many essential nutrients. Try adding one of them to your favorite dishes.

## Romanesco

Romanesco belongs to the broccoli,

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cauliflower and kale family. Romanesco has a slightly nutty flavor and a beautiful yellow-green chartreuse color.

A cross between broccoli and cauliflower, Romanesco can be identified by its beautiful geometric shape. Its conical pyramid base spirals up in [fractal](#) form to a flowering point.

Romanesco is low calorie yet rich with cruciferous nutrients, including vitamins A, C and K. Replace your broccoli or cauliflower with Romanesco for a twist on many classic recipes.

Romanesco came from Italy and only recently became popular in American cuisine, [according to Mario Batali](#).

Look for it sold under any of these pseudonyms: Roman cauliflower, Broccolo Romanesco, Broccoflower and Buzzy Broc. Your local farmers market probably carries Romanesco in August and September.

## Dulse

Dulse is a chewy seaweed, common in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Like other sea vegetables, dulse comes packed with nutrients. Unlike sushi seaweed and kelp, though, dulse has a deep red hue similar to beets.



right for you.



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Questions



Dulse is an excellent source of iodine, iron and potassium. It also provides calcium, zinc and manganese.



You can eat this exotic vegetable dried or fresh. In the United States, you can find it dried in snack packs.

Add dulse to salads, soups and sandwiches for a rich and healthy garnish. For a fun and impressive dessert, try making [Irish dulse soda scones](#).

While dulse can be hard to find fresh, you might spot it in specialty stores in the North Atlantic and Pacific Northwest, or through online retailers such as Amazon.

Dulse may also be sold under the names palmaria palmata, dillisk, dilsk, red dulse and sea lettuce flakes.

## Gai Lan

Gai Lan also belongs to the broccoli family. It is sometimes known as Chinese kale. Gai Lan is popular for stir-fry dishes, but also delicious steamed or sautéed.

This exotic vegetable is rich with beta carotene. [Just one cup](#) also gives you a healthy dose of vitamins C, A, and K.



Gai Lan is popular in Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai cuisines. Identify it by its

long green stem and broad, dark leaves. The long slender broccolini is actually a genetic cross between regular broccoli and Gai Lan.

Look for Gai Lan at your farmers market in summer and fall and check for the alternate spelling, “Kai-Lan.”

## Fiddleheads

Fiddleheads look as quirky as they sound.

Named for the violin scroll they resemble, these green veggies are actually the coiled tops of ostrich fern plants. They are found in northern climates, including Alaska and British Columbia, as well as northern California, the Upper Great Lakes and Southern Appalachians.



Fiddleheads are high in vitamins A and C and protein yet are very low in calories. For 35 calories, you'll enjoy nearly five grams of protein, [according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#).

Fiddleheads should be cooked before consuming in any form, even if you roast or sauté them later. (Skipping this step could put you at risk for [foodborne illness](#), since fiddleheads are a wild plant.)

Once cooked, fiddleheads can be used almost like any other green vegetable. Add them to your favorite stir-fries, pastas, potato dishes and other recipes calling for greens.



Fiddleheads can be found in early spring, before the ferns open, which renders them inedible. Again, check your farmers market.

## Oca

Oca is a colorful tuber with a tangy flavor. It can range in color from yellow to a sultry dark purple, but is often found with more common red-orange flesh. Eat oca as you would potatoes: raw in salads or baked, steamed and mashed.



Oca is rich in vitamin C, riboflavin and fiber, and has fewer calories than regular potatoes.

Oca is popular in South America and New Zealand dishes. Sadly, you'll have a difficult time finding oca in the United States because it's not commercially grown here.

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