

Unleashing the Power of the Onion

by John Rizzo

As a culinarian, when it comes to enhancing soups, sauces and stews; I would suggest that the single most important ingredient is the onion. Although it's odor can be overwhelming and it's fumes may burn your eyes and nose; nothing smells better than onions simmering in oil or butter.

From a nutritional standpoint, onions are fat free, very low in sodium, high in vitamin C and a great source of fiber. Onions are rich in flavonoids, which help the body fight off free radicals which can lead to a number of chronic diseases including cancer.

A natural occurring chemical called organosulfur, linked to lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, is abundant in onions. This is what makes you tear up when you are cutting or cooking onions. To minimize its release into the air when cutting, first chill the onion for about 30 minutes. Then peel the onion from the top down, leaving the root base in tact as long as possible while cutting.

Fresh sweet onions, such as Vidalia and Texas Sweets, are generally available from March through August. In the off season, storage onions are all that are available. They are generally stronger in flavor and have less water content. To take the stinging bite out of storage onions, soak the sliced or diced onions in ice water for a couple of hours; drain then rinse.

To maximize the life of your onions, store them in a cool, dry, and well ventilated area, but not in the refrigerator. Keep them in an open bag or container that will allow for the circulation of air.

Ok, so now you're eating onions and getting healthier by the minute; but even your dog won't put his nose in the same room as you. There are several ways to help mask the onions on your breath, including: chewing on parsley or mint leaves, fresh lemon juice, or a cup of tea. Along with good old fashion brushing, these methods will help.

Baked Onion Blossom with Horseradish Sauce **Yield: 1**

Large Sweet Onion	1	Melted Butter	2 TBL
Dijon Mustard	1 TBL	Parsley	1 tsp.
Bread Crumbs	1/4 Cup	Oregano	1 tsp.
Black Pepper	1 tsp.	Salt	1 tsp.

Slice the top off the onion; leaving the root end in tact. Carefully peel the skin and first layer of onion down to the root and pull off. Begin slicing the onion from the top towards the root end, but not all the way through. (Cut to about 1/2 inch from the bottom.) Continue making crosscuts through the onion like a pie. First in half, then quarters, then eighths, and so on. You will probably end up with 12 or 16 slices. Set the onion on a piece of aluminum foil and brush with melted butter, margarine or vegetable spray—(additional to the melted butter in the ingredient list). Season with salt and pepper. Bring the foil up and over the onion and crimp the edges to seal. Bake in a 425° pre-heated oven for about 25 minutes. Meanwhile, combine the melted butter, Dijon mustard, parsley, oregano and bread crumbs; mix well.

Pull the onion from the oven; open the foil and sprinkle the bread crumb mixture over the onion. Leave the foil around the base of the onion but do not cover the top. Return the onion to the oven for an additional 20 minutes or until the onion is tender. Serve with below dipping sauce.

Horseradish Dipping Sauce **Yield: 3/4 Cup**

Mayonnaise	1/2 Cup	Horseradish	2 TBL
Ketchup	2 tsp.	paprika	1/4 tsp.
Cayenne pepper	1/4 tsp.	Black pepper	1/8 tsp.

Combine all ingredients and chill for 1/2 hour before serving.