

Janice Feuer-Haugen is a private chef and cooking instructor in Bozeman. She attended London's *Cordon Bleu* School of Cookery. She is the author of five cookbooks including *Fruit-Sweet and Sugar Free* and *Chocolate Decadence*. Contact Janice via e-mail at jg31fh4@hotmail.com.



Carrots Are Pure Gold

NATURALLY DELICIOUS RECIPES

Janice Feuer-Haugen

Crunchy, sweet and perfect with dips, carrots are a part of every vegetable tray, yet rarely the star of a meal. Though certainly they should be, for as nutritional superstars carrots are pure gold. Carrots are the richest vegetable source of pro-vitamin A carotenes, the antioxidant compounds that protect against cardiovascular disease and numerous forms of cancer, help regulate blood sugar and promote good vision, especially night vision.

Carrots are available throughout the year, with the freshest and most flavorful locally grown carrots to be had from June through October. Carrots with the deepest orange color have the most beta-carotene. And, generally, carrots with larger diameters will be the sweetest as they have a larger core, where the carrot's sugar is concentrated. With organically grown carrots, there is no need to peel them, just wash them well. As carrots belong to the *Umbelliferae* family (along with fennel, caraway, cumin and dill) the green, feathery tops, with their fresh and slightly bitter taste, are a flavorful addition to summer salads.

Looking and tasting quite different from the carrots we know today, carrots have been cultivated for thousands of years. For most of their history they were purple in color with a tough and fibrous texture. Spreading out from Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries to the Mediterranean, carrots were used medicinally by the ancient Greeks and Romans. However, in the seventeenth century after Europeans developed a more pleasingly textured, orange-colored carrot, they became increasingly popular with both Europeans and Americans. Because of this popularity and their ability to retain their color and shape when cooked, carrots became the first vegetable to be canned in the early eighteenth century.

This month's recipe for Schlata Chizo Metbucha shows off the rich history and flavors of Moroccan cuisine—one of the most exotic in the world—with the nutritional density, crunch and sweet taste that only carrots can offer. The flavors of this traditional Moroccan Carrot Salad are somewhat unknown and intriguing to our American palates, and thus give carrots a starring role as a meal in itself or as a boldly flavored side dish.

To Your Health! —Janice

Shlata Chizo Metbucha Moroccan Carrot Salad

Yield: 6 cups

- 6 cups (2 pounds) carrots sliced into 1/4 inch rounds on the diagonal (peeled if not organic)
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 1/2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon honey
- Few twists of freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of red pepper flakes
- 3 small cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil for sautéing
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley and/or cilantro

Cook carrots for 4 minutes in lightly salted and simmering water over medium heat until just softened. Drain and cool the carrots.

Place the next eleven ingredients in a medium bowl, stirring to combine.

In two batches, sauté the carrot slices in one tablespoon olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. When the carrots are lightly browned, stir them into the dressing ingredients.

This salad can be eaten immediately or made up to a day ahead and refrigerated. For the best flavor, bring it back to room temperature and stir in the chopped parsley and/or cilantro before serving.

For a main-dish salad consider stirring in some of these flavorful additions:

- 1/2 cup quartered kalamata olives
- 1/3 cup toasted pine nuts
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
- 1/3 cup currants or golden raisins

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