Diversity

WE ARE SO EXCITED AND DELIGHTED to introduce the new Diversity and Inclusion section of the website. It is important that diversity and inclusion are practiced in every aspect of our life.

Sherene Chou, MS, RDN
Vegetarian Nutrition Diversity Liaison

Kwanzaa - A Holiday at the Heart of our African Plant-based Heritage!

By Kayellen Umeakunne, MS RDN LD

When we think about heritage, most Americans are from ancestors freely immigrating to the United States from Europe, Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America, Central America, and more recently Africa who all can trace their family lineage back through multiple generations. Even Native Americans, who already inhabited the United States before European invasion, are preserving their culture today. But African
Americans came to the United States through the forced immigration of slavery, known today as human trafficking. To maintain control, slaves were separated from their families and tribes resulting in loss of language and cultural identity. Kwanzaa is a holiday created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966 in effort to fill a void in the longing for all African Americans descended from slavery to recover their African cultural roots and values. It is a blend of multiple continental African practices allowing African Americans to see the rich heritage we came from and bind us together as a family that can collectively grow and achieve greatness. The main common practice across African culture is the festive celebration of first-fruits, or first harvest which sustains people and reinforces the bonds between them. In West Africa this is known as the Yam Festival. Symbols of Kwanzaa are set up in the home to celebrate the holiday beginning on December 26 and ending January 1st. A symbolic table is set up with a mat (foundation), crops (African Harvest), Kinara candle holder (roots), corn (fertility), unity cup, 7 candles (3 red, 1 black, 3 green) which represent seven principles, and gifts (labor of love). Nguzo Saba, Swahili for the 7 principles of Kwanzaa, are Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Kuumba (creativity), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Nia (purpose) and Imani (faith). These African values are taught through the lighting of a candle and family discussion each day. At the end of the 7 days, gifts are given to the children and the community celebrates with a festival of storytelling, music, food, song, drumming, and dance. One myth about Kwanzaa is that it was designed to replace Christmas, but Kwanzaa is actually integrated into Christian services in African American Churches throughout the Christmas season. Kwanzaa festivities are also open to people from all walks of life. Kwanzaa doesn’t really interfere with being on a plant-based diet. First harvest means plants! Many fruit and vegetable dishes reflecting our culture are prepared in addition to other foods during Kwanzaa. It is truly a holiday confirming our plant-based African heritage.

Kayellen's Recipe: Hoppin’ John with Collard Greens

**Ingredients**

- 2 cups - Organic Canned Black-eyed Peas (no added salt)
- 2 cups - Cooked Brown Rice
- 4 cups - Collard Greens (deveined and cut into strips)
- 2 each - Red Bell Pepper (cut into strips)
- 1 each - Yellow Onion (chopped)
- 1 clove - Garlic (minced)
- ½ tsp - Coarse Kosher Salt
- 1 Tbsp+1 tsp - Olive Oil

**Directions**

1. Heat oil in skillet.
2. Add onions and sauté until translucent.
3. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds.
4. Add red bell pepper and cook until tender.
5. Add collard greens and kosher salt.
6. Cover with lid and cook on low heat for 15 minutes until greens are tender.
7. Place rice in large dish.
8. Add black-eyed peas on top of rice.
9. Add collard greens and vegetables on top of rice and peas.

**Nutrition facts (per serving):**
145 Kcal, 4g Protein, 26g Carbohydrate, 3.5g Sugar, 4.5g Dietary Fiber, 3g Fat, 0.5g Saturated Fat, 0g Cholesterol, 130mg Sodium, 347mg Potassium, 103mg Calcium