Superheroes in Your Garden: The Fantastic Four

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Everyone knows that eating lots of fruits and vegetables is important for staying healthy. The best way to have fresh foods available is to grow them yourself! Power-packed with super nutrients, there are some foods that are especially good to eat and easy to grow. They are like superheroes in your garden (cue superhero theme music).

Similar to the comic book superheroes, the Fantastic Four, these garden superheroes have phytochemicals that punch through disease like The Thing and powerful Vitamin C that supports your immune system like the Invisible Woman’s force field. Essential proteins in some foods can reshape and rebuild your body like Mr. Fantastic, and antibacterial qualities in other foods can burn up germs like the Human Torch.

**Phytochemicals – The Thing:**

Eat more brightly colored fruits! The compounds that cause those colors - anthocyanins in blueberries and strawberries are powerful antioxidant phytochemicals that help fend off cancer and other diseases. Phytochemicals are compounds created by plants to fight off diseases and pests; studies prove that many phytochemicals also help people fight off diseases, too. Think of them as The Thing, brightly colored powerhouses punching through free-radicals to keep your cells from oxidizing. Other “fight-o” chemicals you may have heard of are chlorophyll in leafy greens and carotenes that make carrots orange.
**Vitamin C – Invisible Woman:**
Some of the most nutritious leafy greens are also the most easy to grow. Miner's lettuce, *Claytonia perfoliata*, is high in Vitamin C and, like arugula and garden cresses is a great self-sowing plant. Gold Rush miners gathered it from the wild and ate it to prevent scurvy, giving it the name Miner's lettuce. Like the Invisible Woman, Vitamin C can be hidden in places you'd least expect. The greens from violas and violets are said to have three times the Vitamin C of oranges – Euell Gibbons referred to them as “nature's vitamin pill.”

**Proteins – Mr. Fantastic:**
Proteins are considered the building blocks of our bodies. Like Mr. Fantastic, who can twist and move his body into a million shapes, the amino acids that form proteins break apart and reassemble themselves to build our blood, muscles, hair and organs. Sources of protein can be tough to find in the garden, but peas and beans are well-known garden friends. Garden peas can be planted early in the year and sown in succession to ensure a continual harvest throughout the season.

**Antibacterial qualities – Human Torch:**
Culinary herbs like sage, oregano, rosemary and thyme get their strong flavors from volatile oils on their leaves. These strong oils are used to protect the plant against foraging insects and fungal diseases. The antibacterial qualities of these oils have historically been used to guard against pathogens. Like the Human Torch, these herbs will set ablaze any illness causing germs. Thyme and sage extracts are used as active ingredients in natural cleaning products while lavender and rosemary are used in healing formulas. Plus, they are perennial plants so you can plant them once and have a medicine cabinet in your garden for years to come.