

## Leafy Greens

Leafy greens encompass a wide variety of nutritious and flavorful foods, some that bring immediate delight upon mention, others that make us think of other cultures and regions. These "leafy greens" include arugula, bok choy, collard greens, escarole, kale, mustard greens, spinach, Swiss chard, turnip greens, dandelion greens, and more. Most greens are high in vitamins A and C, and many contain minerals such as calcium and iron. For the most part, they are easy to grow in your backyard garden, and will provide a variety of fresh greens over a long growing season.

Flavors can vary significantly, depending on the variety of greens and the age of the plant at harvesting. Collard greens, Swiss chard, bok choy, and spinach have a milder flavor, especially in younger plants. For a more defining taste, try mustard greens, arugula, or turnip greens. Collard greens, kale, turnip greens and mustard greens are best in the fall, and can be found in markets starting in about October. Swiss chard and beet greens are generally available in the summer through the fall.

For a little variety in your diet, try a leafy green that is new to you. There are many recipes available, in cookbooks, old family recipe boxes, and two here!

Mustard greens have oval shaped leaves with scalloped or frilled edges, and a radish-like or peppery flavor. The younger leaves can be added to salads, and the more mature leaves to soups and stews. The seeds are used to make Dijon mustard. Originally from the mountainous regions of India, mustard greens have been cultivated in China, and have made their way to American southern cuisine. They are high in Vitamins A, C, and E, folate, manganese, calcium and potassium, while low in calories. A one-cup serving of boiled mustard greens has only 21 calories and nearly 90 percent of the recommended daily requirement of vitamin A in the form of beta-carotene. These vitamins provide anti-oxidant protection, and are thought to be important in fighting a number of common ailments, including some respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. The high mineral content provides a source of bone building materials, and the indole compounds are under study for their cancer-fighting activity. Mustard greens, like many leafy greens, also contain oxalates, naturally occurring compounds that can interfere with

the absorption of calcium. For this reason, calcium supplementation should be taken away from meals with mustard greens.

Spinach, typically a more familiar leafy green, is said to have been a favorite of 16<sup>th</sup> century Catherine de Medici, of Florence, Italy. Upon marrying the King of France, she brought her own chefs with her, and those dishes prepared on a bed of spinach, favorites of hers, became known as "à la Florentine." Spinach is packed with vitamins A, C, K, riboflavin, folate, and numerous minerals, including manganese, magnesium, calcium, and iron. Nutrients found in spinach are important in bone (Vitamin K) and cardiovascular health (vitamin C, vitamin A in the form of beta carotene, folate, and magnesium, to name just a few.) The fiber components, as well as a number of vitamins found in spinach, are thought to be important in reducing the risk of colon cancer. Lutein, a form of carotene, found in spinach, kale and broccoli, is thought to be protective against macular degeneration and cataracts. A variety of cultures have promoted the consumption of eggs with leafy greens, and it now appears that there may be some evidence to support that. It seems that egg yolks increase the bioavailability of the lutein found in these leafy greens, perhaps by way of the fatty content.

Kale, along with cabbage, collard greens, and Brussels sprouts, belong to the Brassica family, and their sulfur-containing phytochemicals are known for their cancer-fighting capacity. A variety of nutrients in this tasty vegetable include lutein and vitamin A, both important for vision. It also offers a significant amount of Vitamin C, calcium, and fiber. Curly kale has ruffled leaves, is deep green in color, and needs to be washed carefully to get all the sand and soil out. The leaves are tender, but the stems can be tough. A great way to prepare kale that may entice your children to try it is a Dutch tradition: steam the finely chopped leaves with potatoes, and then mash them all together, creating a slightly green mashed potato dish!

Swiss chard, one of our favorites, is a tall, large leaf plant that comes in red, yellow, and white varieties. Like spinach, it is high in vitamins A, C and K. It also has significant amounts of a variety of minerals, including magnesium, manganese, potassium, and iron. It is thought that these nutrients and fiber content play a role in colon cancer prevention. Vitamin K is important in bone health, and, along with the calcium and magnesium, these Swiss chard

nutrients make a valuable contribution to bone maintenance. With the wide variety of nutrients available in Swiss chard, it plays an important role in vision, respiratory health, and cardiovascular protection. Try this traditional family recipe from Italy for Swiss chard:

#### CAPU

(Pronounced ka-poo)

Lightly wilt by steaming several large, healthy leaves. Make a filling of chopped, cooked spinach leaves, an egg, breadcrumbs, Parmesan cheese, and your favorite herbs. Any Swiss chard leaves that are torn can be steamed and chopped for the filling. This mixture should be moist, but not wet. Place 1-2 Tablespoons of the filling in a leaf (carefully remove any tough stems first), and wrap it as a package using the leaf. Tie a fine string around the leaf, securing it tightly. Traditionally boiled, I prefer to steam them, for about 15 - 20 minutes, until the filling is cooked. On serving, cut away the string, slice it open, and add a few drops of olive oil for flavor. Enjoy!

#### Greens in Peanut Sauce

1 medium onion, chopped

2-3 cloves garlic (minced)

In a large soup pot sauté in 1 tbsp oil

1 medium tomato (diced; optional)

Add and simmer 2-4 minutes

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. ground coriander

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. ground cumin

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp salt or to taste

$\frac{1}{8}$  tsp ground cloves

Add, cook, and stir 2 minutes

1 lb kale or collards (8 cups, chopped)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup water

Add and steam until greens are soft but not mushy. Avoid overcooking. Stir occasionally to coat greens with spices.

2-3 tbsp chunky peanut butter

1-2 tsp. hot water

Combine and add to greens at end of cooking time.

