Harvest of the Month | Family Newsletter

Leafy Greens

Leafy greens are plant leaves eaten as vegetables and come in a variety of tastes and textures. Many can be eaten both raw and cooked. Leafy greens include various types of lettuce (e.g. romaine, bibb, butterhead, Boston, arugula, spring mix, red leaf, green leaf, etc.) as well as spinach, Swiss chard, watercress, collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, and kale.

Did you know?

Swiss chard was first grown in Italy, but was named by a Swiss scientist.

Collard greens, mustard greens, and turnip greens are popular in Southern US cuisine. They were introduced in North America when the first Africans arrived in the early 1600's and grew them for themselves and their families throughout times of slavery.

Kale ranges in color from white–green and yellow-green to blue–green and violet. Some varieties were developed for ornamental purposes.

Selection

For lettuce and spring greens, look for bright–colored leaves. Mature spinach should have broad, crisp, dark green leaves. Baby spinach leaves are smaller and thinner. Swiss chard should have deep–green leaves and colorful red, pink, orange, yellow, or white stems. Collard greens, mustard greens, and kale should be dark green and have a crisp texture.

Storage

Leaf lettuce can be stored wrapped in a damp paper towel and sealed in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Spinach, Swiss chard, collard greens, mustard greens, and kale should be stored, unwashed, in an airtight bag in the refrigerator. Spring greens should also not be washed before storing. They should be stored in a plastic bag or container. A loose paper towel in the bag or container will help absorb moisture and extend shelf life.

Handling

If pre–packaged greens are labeled "ready to eat," "triple washed," or "no washing necessary" they do not need to be washed again unless specifically directed on the label. All other leafy greens should be thoroughly washed before eating, processing, or cooking. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before and after handling the greens. Remove and discard outer, coarse, torn, or bruised leaves. Rinse the leafy greens under running water using your hands to gently rub the surfaces of the leaves. Do not soak leafy greens in a sink or bowl filled with water. Dry the leafy greens with a clean cloth or paper towel.

Nutrition

Most leafy greens are rich in many nutrients, such as vitamin A, vitamin C, antioxidants, fiber, folate (a B vitamin), vitamin K, magnesium, calcium, iron and potassium. These nutrients perform a variety of functions in the body, including

promoting good vision and healthy bones, supporting immune function, acting as antioxidants that may help prevent certain cancers, and regulating blood pressure, blood sugar and blood cholesterol. (Iceberg lettuce is the exception as it is lower in nutritional value than the other leafy greens.)

Harvest Season

Spring greens such as arugula and baby kale are harvested in Pennsylvania in April and May with a late season harvest in August through October. Collard greens, mustard greens, and kale have an early harvest season in May and a late season in October to the end of November. Spinach is harvested in May and June with a late crop from August through October. Leaf lettuce, such as romaine, green leaf, and red leaf lettuce is harvested from June through October. Swiss chard is harvested in July through September. Many leafy greens are also grown hydroponically extending their availability beyond the traditional harvest season.

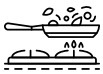
Preparation

There are many ways to enjoy leafy greens including the following:

Salads: Use leafy greens such as romaine lettuce, baby kale, spinach, and arugula in salads along with other salad vegetables. Consider tossing together a salad made half with familiar lettuce and half with a dark green one to gradually introduce the leafy greens.

Soups: Leafy greens with tougher leaves such as collard greens, kale, or mustard greens can be added to soups.

Sandwiches/Subs/Wraps: Try leafy greens in place of iceberg lettuce.



Stir-fry: Add chopped spinach or kale to a favorite stir fry recipe.

Steamed: Collard greens, mustard greens, kale and spinach can be steamed until they're slightly soft.

In an omelet: Add steamed spinach to an omelet for a boost in color and nutrients.

Recipe | Potato, Black Bean, & Kale Skillet

Makes: 4 Servings

Ingredients	Amount	Instructions
Red potatoes	4	1. Dice potatoes into ¼" pieces.
Kale (curly Italian or other variety, approx. 6 oz.)	2 ½ cups	2. Chop kale.
Olive oil	2 tablespoons	3. Heat oil, in large skillet over medium heat, Add garlic and onions; cook 2–3 minutes until just starting to brown.
Garlic (minced)	1 clove	
Chopped onion	¼ cup	
Chili powder	1 teaspoon	4. Add diced potatoes, chili, salt, and pepper to skillet, cover with lid and cook 8–10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
Salt	¼ teaspoon	
Cayenne pepper	⅛ teaspoon	5. Add chopped kale and black beans. Cook about 3–5 more minutes, stirring gently.
Black beans (drained and and rinsed)	1 can 15 oz. no salt added	
Greek yogurt	½ cup nonfat plain	6. Serve with Greek yogurt.

Source: Produce for Better Health Foundation.

Check out the PA Harvest of the Month website (www.paharvestofthemonth.org) for sources, additional resources, and recipes.

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