

Great Greens!

by Elizabeth Keyser

Think nothing's perfect? Think again. The foods known as "greens" are anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, bursting with vitamins, minerals, and disease-fighting phytochemicals. They're inexpensive, available year-round, and low in calories and carbs. And research has shown that increasing your daily intake of leafy greens by just 1 1/2 servings may lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 14 percent. (And yes, if you already have diabetes, it still makes a difference!)

In other words, they're nature's perfect food.

Most greens grow in cooler, less humid weather. For this reason, you can find fresh greens in winter at the grocery store -- and in farmer's markets (or your back yard!) during the spring and fall.

These nutrient powerhouses are well worth getting to know and learning how to prepare. Try a new one this week. Your body will thank you.

SOURCE: Carter, Patrice, Laura J. Gray, Jacqui Troughton, Kamlesh Khunti, and Melanie J. Davies. 2010. Fruit and vegetable intake and incidence of type 2 diabetes mellitus: systemic review and meta-analysis. *British Medical Journal*. 341:e4229.

Taming Greens

Supermarkets carry an abundance of greens year-round: Look for dandelion, chard, arugula, collards, kale, escarole, or use the tops of radishes (yes, radishes!), turnips, and beets. They're easy to prepare.

The trick to making greens delicious is to tame them. Blanch in boiling salted water. And pair with contrasting, sweet or rich flavors and creamy or crunchy textures.

dandelion greens

In winter months, you might find dandelion greens in a large produce department, but in early spring, try picking your own wild dandelion leaves (just make sure they haven't been sprayed with pesticides). This ancient tradition gets you outdoors, moving, and feeling connected to the earth. Plus, it will give you a free salad chock full of vitamins and minerals. Dandelions are delicious when prepared -- and paired -- just right.

Look-a-like chicory is edible, too. Pick dandelions before they've flowered when they're at their tastiest.

Read on for a delicious way to prepare them.

Dandelion Greens Salad

Chunks of rich, buttery avocado and fresh, sweet crunchy red pepper are perfect foils for the more bitter dandelion, dressed in apple cider vinaigrette. Or creamy goat cheese and toasted pine nuts, with just a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

One cup of raw dandelion leaves contains 5.1 grams of carbs, 2 grams of fiber, and is rich in vitamins A, and C.

Arugula or baby spinach would be good with these preparations, too, if dandelion isn't available.

Chard Turned Comfort Food

Vitamin valedictorian Swiss chard can produce two very different dishes. First, the earthy-flavored stems are mellowed when blanched and then baked in a little heavy cream under a mixture of grated cheese and whole grain bread crumbs. (You can do a combo of half bread crumbs and half crushed cashews or macadamia nuts to bring down the carbs. [Click here](#) or more breadcrumb substitute ideas.)

Health bonus: In animal studies, chard has been shown to protect the kidneys against the complications of diabetes.

SOURCE: Yanarda R, Bolkent S, Ozsoy-Saan O, Karabulut-Bulan O. 2002. The effects of chard (*Beta vulgaris* L. var. *cicla*) extract on the kidney tissue, serum urea and creatinine levels of diabetic rats. *Phytother Res.* Dec;16(8):758-61.

Rainbow of Nutrition

Pretty enough to put in a vase, the rainbow variety of chard leaves also lend themselves to the simplest preparation. Simmer them in salted water until tender, drain, and press out excess moisture. Drizzle on extra virgin olive oil and sprinkle with toasted garlic chips. Serve with chard stems "au gratin" (see previous slide).

One cup of cooked chard has 7.2 grams of carbs, and is rich in vitamins K, A, C, B6, calcium, iron, riboflavin, magnesium, potassium, and 4 grams of dietary fiber.

Chard loses some of its nutrient potency in cooking, especially in water, so cook just until the leaves are tender to the tooth -- taste them!

SOURCE: Jiminez-Monreal AM, Garcia-Diz L, Martinez-Tomi M, Mariscal M, Murcia MA. Influence of cooking methods on antioxidant activity of vegetables. *J Food Sci.* 2009 Apr;74(3):H97-H103

Don't Throw Out the Tops!

Most green tops of root vegetables like beets, turnips, and radishes can be wilted and served the same way. Spinach, too. Just simmer until wilted in a little salted water, press out the moisture, drizzle on extra virgin olive oil, fresh pepper, and garlic chips. Pair wilted turnip greens with

roasted baby turnips, like these above. Roasted baby turnips have a natural sweet flavor that contrasts with the tender greens.

Spicy, Delicate Arugula

Beans over greens sounds good and tastes better. Warm, satisfying white beans, sauteed with onion, garlic, parsley, and rosemary, are spooned over raw baby arugula greens dressed in extra virgin olive oil. The beans tame and wilt those spicy babies.

Although one-half cup serving of small white beans has 23 grams of carbs, it also delivers 10g fiber, protein, calcium, iron, and minerals. Arugula has less than 1 gram of carbs in a 1-cup serving, and is rich in vitamins A, C, K, and folate and calcium.

Soup's On

Ever thought of eating radish greens? Try them in soup. The greens contain more nutrients (vitamin C, calcium, potassium, and folate) than do the bulbs. Wilt the greens in chopped, sauteed onions and garlic, add chicken broth, and simmer until the leaves are tender. Puree, and add a tablespoon or two of cream to this slightly piquant elixir.

Serve with lightly buttered, mini whole grain croutons and very thin slices of radish (the bulb). Almost any fresh green -- escarole, anyone? -- boosts the nutritional value of homemade or canned soups.

Presto! It's Pesto

Who needs basil? Above is an arugula pesto made with macadamias instead of pine nuts. You can make pesto from spinach too. A nice combination is baby spinach, Parmesan, walnuts, olive oil, and garlic. Use your mortar and pestle to crush the small bits, but a food processor is your friend when it comes to pureeing big batches of green leaves.

Try this dLife recipe for [Cheesy Spinach Pesto](#).

Spinach and cheese pesto flavored with almond and garlic.

Rating: ★★★★★
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 3 minutes
Difficulty: EASY



Ingredients

- 1 lb [fresh chopped spinach](#) , trimmed
- 4 oz [plain yogurt](#)
- 1/2 cup [cottage cheese](#)
- 1/4 cup [grated Parmesan cheese](#)

2 tbsp [dried basil](#)
1/4 cup [whole almonds](#) , chopped
2 [medium garlic cloves](#)
1/4 cup [chopped parsley](#) , stems removed
1 floz [cold water](#)

Directions

1 In large saucepan, bring water to boil. Place spinach in steamer basket, place basket into pan and steam spinach for 3 minutes.
2 Rinse and drain spinach.
3 In blender or food processor, add cooked spinach, yogurt, cottage cheese, Parmesan cheese, basil, almonds, garlic, and parsley. Purée until smooth.

Ooh Baby! Spinach

While mature spinach leaves can be tough and the stems need to be removed, baby spinach is soft, mild, and the stems give it a nice little crunch. Try this recipe for African Fried Spinach.

Ingredients

10 oz [fresh baby spinach](#)
1 cup [fresh shiitake mushrooms](#)
1 [yellow onion](#)
1 tbsp [olive oil](#)
1/4 tsp [garlic powder](#)
1 pinch [salt](#)
1 pinch [black pepper](#)

Directions

1 Pull stems from shiitakes and discard. Stack shiitake caps and cut into quarters.
2 Peel and coarsely chop onion.
3 Rinse spinach and shake to remove water.
4 In large skillet or wok over medium high, heat 1 teaspoon olive oil.
5 When oil is hot add mushrooms and onion. Sauté, stirring occasionally, until onions are translucent and liquid from mushrooms has evaporated, about 7-8 minutes.
6 Add spinach to pan and cover. After 1 minute, remove lid and turn spinach. Add garlic powder.
7 Cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally until spinach has wilted, about 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Cruciferous Kale

One cup of chopped, cooked kale contains 7g of carbs and 3g of fiber. It is also a real rock star when it comes to vitamins and phytonutrients, packing in more nutritional gold than almost any other food. The nutrients in kale protect against cataracts, some cancers, and may also help prevent cardiovascular disease.

SOURCES:

Moeller Suzen M., Paul F. Jacques and Jeffrey B. Blumberg. 2000. The Potential Role of Dietary Xanthophylls in Cataract and Age-Related Macular Degeneration. *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 19 (90005): 522S-527S.

Angeloni C, E Leoncini, M Malaguti, S Angelini, P Hrelia, SJ Hrelia. 2009. Modulation of phase II enzymes by sulforaphane: implications for its cardioprotective potential. *Agric Food Chem*, 57(12):5615-22.

Murillo G and RG Mehta. 2001. Cruciferous vegetables and cancer prevention. *Nutr Cancer*, 41(1-2):17-28.

Chop it Up

The more finely you chop, shred, and mince your greens, the more uses you can find. In soups, salads, sauces, burgers, meatloaf, dips, or just sauteed in butter and garlic with grated Parmesan, finely chopped greens like the kale above, are a versatile filler or side dish.