

Vegetable of the Month: Cooking Greens

Cooking greens are a Southern tradition – and superstitiously thought to bring good luck for the upcoming year when eaten on New Year's Day. They include any type of cabbage where the green leaves do not form a compact head. Collard, mustard, kale, swiss chard, and broccoli rabe are all varieties of cooking greens.

Collard Greens

Collards are the oldest known greens in the cabbage family dating back to ancient times because of their similarity to cabbage eaten by prehistoric people. In addition, ancient Greeks and Romans cultivated collard greens. Collards are native to the eastern Mediterranean region and Asia Minor. In approximately 400 B.C. they were brought to Britain and France by either the Romans or Celts. The first documentation of collard greens in America was in 1669 though it is possible they were present in the colonies at an even earlier date.

Collard greens grow best in warm weather though they can withstand the cold temperatures of late autumn. Interestingly enough, the flavor of collard greens is enhanced by a light frost.

Though available year-round, collard greens are at their peak from January through April. The best collards are found in crisp bunches with leaves still intact. Collards can also be found canned. Fresh collards should be stored in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator or in a plastic bag with holes in it. Serving Size: 1/2 cup, cooked (95g)
Calories 25

Mustard Greens

Mustard greens are the most pungent of the cooking greens and lend a peppery flavor to food. They originated in the Himalayan region of India more than 5,000 years ago. Like many other cooking greens, mustard can be found in many Chinese, African-American, and southern dishes. Brassica juncea, the mustard plant, is characterized by its crumpled or flat leaves that may have scalloped, frilled or lacey edges. In addition, this plant produces the brown seeds that are used to make Dijon mustard.

Mustard greens are an excellent source of both vitamins A and C and contain several other vitamins and minerals as well as fiber and protein. Mustard greens can be found year-round though they are at their peak from December through April. Mustard greens come in many different varieties and can be found dark, light, short, fat, smooth, curly etc. In the United States, the leaves on mustard greens are typically soft, green and oval-shaped, frilled at the edges (similar to romaine lettuce) and attached to long stems. When selecting these greens, be sure to avoid those that have yellow or brown leaves, dry leaves, or coarse, fibrous stems. If you plan to use the mustard greens for salad it is wise to pick very small leaves whereas any size leaves will do if you are cooking them.

Mustard greens should be wrapped tightly in plastic and kept in the refrigerator. However, they only last a few days quickly becoming faded, dry and yellow.

Serving Size: 1/2 cup, cooked (70g)
Calories 10

Kale

Like other greens, kale descends from wild cabbage that originated in Asia Minor though it is known for its popularity in Scandinavia, Germany, Holland and Scotland. Kale was brought to the United States in the 17th century by English settlers. It is now a favorite in the southern United States where, like many cooking greens, it has been considered a poor man's food.

With long ruffled leaves that resemble large parsley sprigs and hues that vary from lavender to chartreuse, kale has a mild cabbage-like taste and delicate texture.

Like most cooking greens, kale can grow in colder temperatures and withstand frost — which actually helps produce even sweeter leaves. Kale can also grow well in the hot weather in the southern United States and in poor soil. Kale is an excellent source of vitamin A and vitamin C.

Kale is available year-round though it is most flavorful and abundant during the winter months. It is best to select small, deep-colored kale bunches with clean leaves. Avoid kale with dry leaves as well as that with dry, browned, yellowed or coarse stems. In the marketplace kale should be kept refrigerated or on ice (or in an outdoor market in the winter).

Best when kept at 32°, kale should be stored wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator crisper. Kale can only be kept for a few days.

Serving Size: 1/2 cup, cooked (65g)
Calories 20

Swiss Chard

The vegetable's scientific name is *Beta vulgaris* subspecies *circulata* with the word *circulata* referring to Sicily where swiss chard first grew. Its popular name stems from the fact that a Swiss botanist determined the plant's

scientific name. Today, swiss chard is most popular in the Mediterranean. Swiss chard can also be found in northern Europe and South America. Swiss chard is extremely versatile, has a mild sweet yet slightly bitter flavor (similar to beets), and has large green leaves with ribs running throughout. The leaves can be smooth or curly and are attached to fleshy, crunchy white, red or yellow celery-like stalks.

Swiss chard is available from spring through the fall with a peak from June through October. Choose swiss chard that has crisp stalks and firm, bright leaves. Like other greens, chard should be wrapped in plastic and can be kept in the refrigerator for approximately 2 days. If blanched, swiss chard greens can be frozen. Boil greens for 2 minutes, drain, chill in ice water and drain again and pack in an airtight container.

Swiss chard is an excellent source of vitamins A and C.

Serving Size: 1/2 cup, cooked (88g)
Calories 15

Broccoli Rabe

Broccoli rabe was originally cultivated in the southern Mediterranean. It was brought to the United States in the 1920's by Italian farmers. Broccoli rabe has been most popular in the Italian and Asian communities for the past several years.

Broccoli rabe looks similar to thin broccoli stalks with small clusters of buds and smooth leaves with sawtooth edges. Broccoli rabe has a somewhat bitter taste and should be cooked to help mellow that taste. It is an excellent source of vitamins A and C.

Broccoli rabe is available year-round (with the exception possibly being June and July) though its peak season is between late fall and early spring. It is grown in Quebec, California, Arizona, and other states.

Broccoli rabe can be found in a refrigerator case sprinkled with ice because it wilts very easily. When selecting this vegetable, choose firm, green, small stems with compact heads and flower buds that are tightly closed and dark green, not open or yellow.

Broccoli rabe should be stored in a refrigerator crisper unwashed, either wrapped in a wet towel or in a plastic bag for a maximum of three days. To keep it longer, blanch and freeze it.

Serving Size: 1 cup raw, chopped (85g)
Calories 25

Preparation

Prior to cleaning greens, any wilted or yellow leaves should be removed. Next, dunk greens into a bowl of tepid water a few times to clean. Drain and use a salad spinner to dry greens for use in salads. For use in cooking, it is not necessary to completely dry leaves.

Traditionally, greens are boiled or simmered very slowly with a piece of ham hock for an extended period of time until they are quite soft. This softens the texture and decreases some of their bitter flavor. Greens can also be steamed, microwaved, added to soups, salads, stews, and other dishes.

To decrease the bitterness of greens, blanch them in boiling water for approximately one minute prior to cooking (though this does diminish some of their nutritional value), the color, flavor and texture will be preserved. Greens can then be sautéed (do not use aluminum or iron pans), or added to various dishes during cooking.

Broccoli rabe is very bitter when raw so it is recommended to cook this vegetable.

Curried Mustard Greens & Garbanzo Beans with Sweet Potatoes

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals 1 cup of fruit or vegetables

Ingredients

2 medium sweet potatoes peeled and sliced thin
1 medium onion cut in half and sliced thin
2 medium cloves garlic, sliced
½ cup + 1 Tbsp chicken or vegetable broth
½ tsp curry powder
¼ tsp turmeric
2 cups chopped and rinsed mustard greens
1 15 oz can sodium free diced tomatoes
1 15 oz can garbanzo beans, drained
2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
salt and white pepper to taste

Steam peeled and sliced sweet potatoes for approximately 5–8 minutes. While steaming potatoes, slice onion and garlic. Heat 1 Tbsp broth in 12 inch skillet. Sauté onion in broth over medium heat for about 4–5 minutes stirring frequently, until translucent. Add garlic, curry powder, turmeric, and mustard greens. Cook, stirring occasionally until mustard greens are wilted, about 5 minutes. Add garbanzo beans, diced tomatoes, salt and pepper. Cook for another 5 minutes.

Mash sweet potatoes with olive oil, salt and pepper. If you need to thin potatoes, add a little more broth. Serve mustard greens with mashed sweet potatoes.

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 244, Protein 9g, Fat 8g, Calories From Fat 30%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 35g, Fiber 9g, Sodium 351mg.

Poached Eggs with Collard Greens

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals 1 1/2 cups of fruit or vegetables

Ingredients

5 cups chopped collard greens (stems removed)
1 medium onion cut in half and sliced thin
5 fresh shiitake mushrooms, sliced medium thick with stems removed
4 fresh free range chicken eggs
about 4 cups water
1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar, or any white wine vinegar

Dressing

1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 Tbsp minced fresh ginger
2 large cloves garlic, pressed
1 Tbsp soy sauce
1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
salt and white pepper to taste over collard greens & shiitake mushrooms

Bring lightly salted water to a boil in a steamer. Rinse greens well, fold leaves in half and chop. Steam for about 7 minutes. Add mushrooms, onion and steam for another 5 minutes.

While steaming greens, get ready for poaching by bringing water and vinegar to a fast simmer in a small, shallow pan. You can start on high heat, and once it comes to a boil, reduce heat to a simmer before adding eggs. Make sure there is enough water to cover eggs.

Mix together lemon juice, ginger, garlic, soy sauce, olive oil, salt, and pepper in a small bowl.

When greens are almost done, poach eggs until desired doneness. This will take about 5 minutes, or just until the white is set and the yolk has filmed over.

Press greens with the back of a spoon slightly to remove excess water. Remove vegetables from steamer and toss with dressing. Remove eggs from water with a slotted spoon and place on plate of tossed greens.

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 321, Protein 22g, Fat 10g, Calories From Fat 28%, Cholesterol 212mg, Carbohydrates 36g, Fiber 9g, Sodium 354mg.

Ginger Kale Soup

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals 1/2 cup of fruit or vegetables

Source: Melissa's

Ingredients

4 cups kale heavy stems removed well washed & chopped
2 Tbsp water
1 Tbsp ginger root, peeled and mashed
1 Tbsp virgin olive oil

2 Tbsp chopped onion
2 Tbsp flour
4 cups skim milk
¼ Tbsp cayenne pepper
salt and ground pepper
sherry
freshly grated nutmeg

Place the kale in a heavy saucepan with the water. Cover and cook on medium-low heat for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add more water if necessary. When the kale is almost limp, remove it from the pot. Using a food processor or blender, blend kale along with ginger. Process for a few minutes until very fine.

Heat the olive oil in the heavy saucepan. Add the onion and sauté for about 2 minutes. Whisk in the flour, being careful to keep the mixture smooth. Gradually add the milk and continue to stir. Season with salt, pepper, and cayenne. Add the kale mixture. Heat the soup until almost boiling. Ladle into bowls, and just before serving add 1 teaspoon of sherry to each bowl and mix gently. To finish, grate fresh nutmeg over each bowl.

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 165, Protein 11g, Fat 4g, Calories From Fat 23%, Cholesterol 5mg, Carbohydrates 23g, Fiber 2g, Sodium 137mg.

Lentil and Swiss Chard Soup

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals 3/4 cup of fruit or vegetables

Source: Melissa's

Ingredients

1 cup green lentils
1 lb swiss chard, washed, trimmed and chopped into ½ inch strips
6 ¾ cups water
10 cloves garlic, peeled
¼ tsp salt
juice of 2 lemons
2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Put the lentils and water in a large saucepan and place over high heat. Bring to a boil, add the chopped chard, and reduce the heat to medium. Cover the pan and boil gently for 15 minutes. Mix the softened chard and the lentils well and cook uncovered for another 45 minutes.

In the meantime, place the garlic cloves in a mortar, add a generous pinch of salt, and pound with a pestle until you have a smooth paste. Slowly incorporate the lemon juice into the garlic paste, then do the same with the olive oil. Add the garlic mixture to the soup. Season with salt and simmer uncovered for 5 minutes. Serve at room temperature.

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 246, Protein 14g, Fat 7g, Calories From Fat 24%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 34g, Fiber 9g, Sodium 266mg.

Quinoa with Broccoli Rabe

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals 1/2 cup of fruit or vegetables

Ingredients

1 cup quinoa
2 cups low sodium vegetable broth
2/3 cup chopped onion
1 tsp minced garlic
1 lb broccoli rabe, trimmed and chopped
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Toast quinoa, stirring, in nonstick skillet over medium-low heat, 5 minutes. Bring broth and water to boil in medium saucepan; stir in quinoa. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and simmer 12 to 15 minutes until liquid is absorbed and quinoa is tender. Fluff with fork and transfer to large bowl; cover and keep warm.

Heat a small amount of water or broth in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic; cook 3 minutes. Stir in broccoli rabe, salt and red pepper. Cook until broccoli rabe is tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir vegetables into quinoa. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories 225, Protein 12g, Fat 3g, Calories From Fat 13%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 38g, Fiber 3g, Sodium 79mg.