



Nutrition News

Leafy Greens: Making Them Tasty and Nutritious

Amid all the diet wars and conflicting claims, there's one class of food that (almost) everyone agrees is a nutritional winner: leafy greens. Beloved by vegans ("Fiber!") and ketovores ("Low-carb!"), leafy greens give us a giant heap of nutrients in a very low-calorie package. Eating leafy greens is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and dementia.

In theory, we're all eating our leafy greens every day, and we live happily ever after. In practice, of course, that's not what's going on. Many people, especially those of us whose childhood greens were limited to iceberg lettuce and canned spinach, get overwhelmed by the challenges of keeping ourselves and our families in green-land.

What counts as leafy greens?

A leafy green, for our purposes, is any such leaf that humans find edible - but not all plant leaves are edible.

There are several types of leafy greens, including plants like lettuce and kale, in which everything above the roots is a leaf. There are also plants with edible leaves in addition to other edible parts: radishes and beets, for example. As the name suggests, greens are typically green, although some varieties come in other colors, for example, purple kale and red chard. As with other plants, their color scheme tells us a lot about their nutritional profile. Regardless of individual differences, in general, leafy greens are high in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, as well as being a good source of fiber.

Types of Leafy Greens

Each of the edible leafy greens fits into one of six categories:

- **Cruciferous Greens:** Cruciferous greens include arugula, kale, bok choy, cabbage, collard greens, and more. These greens are rich sources of amazing organosulfur compounds, including the breakout star, sulforaphane. Ongoing research suggests that sulforaphane is one of the most potent anticancer nutrients ever studied.
- **Taproot Greens:** Certain root vegetables come with a wonderful nutritional bonus: their leafy tops. These include radish greens, beet greens, carrot tops, celeriac greens, and turnip greens, among many others.
- **Lettuce Greens:** The lettuce family is perhaps the one we most associate with uncooked leafy greens. In the last couple of decades, westerners have discovered many varieties other than iceberg and romaine, including butterhead, red leaf, green leaf, Bibb, Boston, and oak.
- **Chicory Family Greens:** the most commonly consumed chicory greens include endive (which you can pronounce "enn-dive" or "on-deev," depending on whether you want to sound downhome or fancy), and frisee, which you pronounce "free-zay," and never "frisbee."
- **Amaranth Family Greens:** Amaranth is a popular perennial plant, varieties of which are grown either for their pseudocereal grains, ornamentally for their brightly-colored, catkin-like flowers, and for their green leaves. Greens from plants in the amaranth family include amaranth greens, spinach, and Swiss chard.
- **Herb Greens:** All green herbs are leafy greens and pack some of the most powerful nutritional profiles into their intensely flavored leaves. In addition to parsley, some of the most common include basil, oregano, cilantro, thyme, and rosemary.

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Leafy Greens (continued)

Washing & Storing Leafy Greens

If you buy greens that aren't pre-washed, you'll probably want to wash them to remove dirt and even little bugs (who enjoy greens as much as we do). And some greens are contaminated with invisible pesticide residues as well. Plain water will remove dirt and some pesticides, but you'll want a slightly more potent cleanser to completely remove pesticide residue. Scientists have tested various produce cleaners, and discovered that the most effective method for cleaning leafy greens is a baking soda solution.

Ice bath removed the least grit (and was, perhaps unsurprisingly, unpleasantly cold). Filling the entire sink with water and immersing the greens was wasteful of water. The winner: Filling a salad spinner with water (or a baking soda solution) and greens, letting them sit for a bit, then pouring off the water, rinsing, and spinning dry.

How to Choose and Store Leafy Greens

When buying leafy greens, look for fresh, firm leaves and bright colors. Avoid greens that look wilted or have yellow or brown spots. They should also pass the "sniff test," and either not smell at all, or give off an aroma like the plant's characteristic taste.

Store greens in the refrigerator, unwashed, and rinse and dry them just before using. You can keep them wrapped in produce bags (like these reusable mesh bags), with all the air burped out, or store them in an airtight container. Most do well in the fridge's crisper drawer. Hardy leaves like kale and collards will last longer than lettuces or bok choy, but why wait? Try to eat leafy greens within a couple of days of purchase - or picking, if you're going to have a garden this year. Bon appetit!



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Lemony Braised Kale* and Tomatoes

* = recipe can also use mustard greens or collards

Ingredients

2 ½ cups vegetable broth (preferably homemade, no salt added)
1 medium yellow onion (diced)
4 garlic cloves, minced - or 3/4 tsp. garlic powder
2 lbs kale (about 10 large stalks with leaves and stems)
1 cup organic tomato (chopped)
1 large lemon (juiced)
salt (optional)
pepper (optional)

Directions

- 1 Wash and de-stem the kale by pulling off the leaves. You can save the stems for making vegetable broth or smoothies.
- 2 Chop leaves into 2-inch pieces and set aside.
- 3 Heat a large stovetop pan on medium-high heat.
- 4 Add ¼ cup vegetable broth.
- 5 When vegetable broth is hot, add the onion and cook until translucent, about 3–4 minutes. Depending on your stovetop pan, you may need to add more vegetable broth to prevent sticking. Add as needed.
- 6 Add the minced garlic and saute for 30–60 seconds.
- 7 Add the kale and tomatoes. Saute until the kale is wilted.
- 8 Add the rest of the vegetable broth and boil.
- 9 Turn down heat to a simmer and cover. Let simmer for 30 minutes.
- 10 Add a squeeze of lemon, and a pinch or two of salt and pepper if using.
- 11 Serve alongside your favorite main dish!

Source: foodrevolution.org