

Greens

Choosing, Storing, Preparing, and Enjoying

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There are many different types of greens to choose from, including fresh, frozen, and canned options. Greens include varieties of lettuce, beet and turnip tops, Swiss chard, chicory (curly endive), collards, dandelion and mustard greens, kale, endive, escarole, parsley, rape, spinach, watercress, and more. Some greens are enjoyed raw, and some—like collards and beet, mustard, and turnip greens—are better cooked. Greens can be prepared in a variety of ways. They are packed with vitamins and minerals to support health. Consider the points below when choosing, storing, and preparing greens to enjoy and reap the benefits from them.

Choosing Greens

- When selecting greens, look for:
- Bright green leaves
 - Leaves should appear fresh, young, moist, and tender.
 - Avoid yellowed leaves or greens with blemishes.
 - Little, coarse stems with leaves
 - “Low sodium” or “no salt added” on canned greens
 - Plain, frozen greens to add your own sauces or seasonings to

When selecting fresh greens for cooking, keep in mind that they cook down to three-fourths or less of their original volume. One pound of kale yields about 2½ cups cooked; 1 pound of mustard greens yields about 1½ cups cooked.

Storing Greens


- To extend the life of your greens, save food dollars, and enjoy the best flavor and texture, consider these storage tips:
- Store greens in the coldest section of the refrigerator. Do not wash until you are ready to use them.
 - Use greens within two to three days.
 - Store greens away from ethylene gas producers like tomatoes, bananas, apples, kiwi, and bell peppers.
 - Some greens can be frozen now to be enjoyed later. Check out [Freezing Vegetables \(FCS3-335\)](#) to learn more.

Preparing Greens

Wash greens well under running water or swirl them in luke-warm water in a large bowl to allow the dirt to sink to the bottom of the bowl. Remove any roots, rough ribs, and the center stalk if it is large or fibrous. Greens commonly eaten raw include lettuce, spinach, and kale. To use greens in salads, thoroughly drain and dry them. This allows the salad dressing to stick to the leaves.

Some greens are more enjoyable after cooking. Greens are often steamed, sautéed, baked, microwaved, or added to dishes. Mild-flavored greens such as chard, kale, or spinach should be steamed until barely tender. Strong-flavored greens such as collard, mustard, or turnip greens need longer cooking in a seasoned broth. To avoid bitterness, blanch strong-flavored greens before adding them to soups and stews. When selecting greens for cooking, remember that they cook down to three-fourths or less of their original volume.

Greens work together with other foods in a balanced eating pattern to support our health in a variety of ways



Support strong bones

Supports eye health

Fights infection

Enhance immunity

Protect against cancer

Promote proper digestion

Table 1. Cooking and freezing greens.

Method	Steps to Take
Cook	Add washed greens to a medium saucepan with 1/4 inch of water in the bottom of the pan. Salt, if desired, using 1/2 teaspoon salt for every pound of greens. Bring the water to a boil. Cover and cook until tender. For leafy greens, cook 1 to 3 minutes, until they are wilted. For other greens, cook until they are crisp-tender (about 5 to 10 minutes). Many seasonings and herbs are available that will enhance the flavor of greens without adding sodium. Try allspice, lemon, onion, nutmeg, or vinegar. Or braise the greens by adding 1/4 cup olive oil and 1 to 2 cloves of minced garlic to 1 pound of greens, and then cook them an additional 20 minutes. (Do not use an aluminum pan when cooking greens. Natural acids in the greens may pit the aluminum pans.)
Freeze	Wash young tender green leaves thoroughly and cut off woody stems. Greens must be blanched before freezing. Blanch collards in water for 3 minutes and all other greens 2 minutes. Cool, drain, and package, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal, label, and freeze. Greens store well for up to one year

Enjoying Greens

Greens are available fresh, and some can be enjoyed raw while others are better prepared. Some greens are also available frozen and canned. Both options provide the nutrients of fresh greens but may be more convenient, accessible, and budget-friendly. Choose lower sodium versions if they are seasoned and minimize using frozen greens with sauces to reduce sodium and saturated fat. Flavor frozen greens yourself once cooked.

Recipes

Cooked Greens

Yield: 8 servings

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1½ large white onions, diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 pound beef sirloin, cut into cubes
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 1½ cubes of chicken bouillon
- 2 pounds collard greens, washed and chopped

Directions

- In a 5-quart pot over medium heat, add olive oil, onions, garlic, and beef. Stir to combine and cook for about 5 minutes.
- Add salt and chicken bouillon cubes. Stir to combine.
- Once the meat is fully cooked and reaches 145°F using a food thermometer, add collard greens. Cook until the greens are soft and tender, about 5 minutes. Serve.

Per serving: 240 calories; 17g fat; 35 milligrams cholesterol; 650 milligrams sodium; 9 grams carbohydrate; 16 grams protein

Pork with Greens and Beans

Yield: 6 servings

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 pound boneless pork butt
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 sliced onion
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 (14 ounce) can diced no-salt-added tomatoes
- 2 cups chopped kale
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 (14 ounce) cans low-sodium cannellini beans

Directions

- Heat oil over medium heat in a medium skillet.
- Brown pork on all sides and transfer to a slow cooker.
- Add chicken broth and onion slices to the slow cooker and cook on low for five hours.
- Shred or cut pork into bite-sized pieces.
- Add garlic powder, tomatoes, kale, mustard, salt, pepper, and beans to the slow cooker. Cook for an additional hour.

Per serving: 400 calories; 16 grams fat; 75 milligrams cholesterol; 640 milligrams sodium; 30 grams carbohydrate; 31 grams protein

Turnip Green Soup

Yield: 6 servings

- 8 ounces, fresh turnip greens, chopped or 1/2 package, frozen turnip greens, thawed and chopped
- 8 ounces roasted turkey, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh carrot, chopped
- 1 cup, peeled and diced potato
- 1/2 clove garlic, minced
- 1 15-ounce can white beans
- 1 14-ounce can chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

Directions

- If using fresh greens, cook until tender.
- Chop fresh or frozen turnip greens, roasted turkey, onion, and carrot. Peel and dice potato and garlic clove.
- Place chopped vegetables and chopped roasted turkey in a large soup pot. Drain and rinse white beans. Add beans, chicken broth, salt, and 1 cup water or enough to cover all ingredients. Stir well.
- Place pot on stove and bring to a boil. Add red pepper flakes.
- Cover, reduce heat, and simmer for one hour, stirring frequently.

Per serving: 120 calories; 3.5 grams fat; 30 milligrams cholesterol; 420 milligrams sodium; 10 grams carbohydrate; 12 grams protein

Zesty Herb Salad Dressing (to be used with greens in a salad)

Yield: 5 servings

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1/3 cup tomato or orange juice
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

Directions

- Put all ingredients in a jar or bottle with a lid. Place lid on jar and shake well.
- Chill in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour before serving. Shake before using and serve on salad greens.

Per serving: 35 calories; 3 grams fat; 0 milligrams cholesterol; 115 milligrams sodium; 2 grams carbohydrate; 0 grams protein

References

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Resources

For information about growing produce, check out NEP's Growing Your Own Garden series and Kentucky State University's Gardening Fact Sheets at <https://www.planeatmove.com/get-moving/growing-your-own-garden/>.

- Collards can be found [here](#).
- Kale can be found [here](#).
- Mustard greens can be found [here](#).
- Lettuce can be found [here](#).

For more information on using fresh greens, consider Plate It Up! Kentucky Proud recipes <https://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/plate-it-kentucky-proud>.

The recipes listed can be found at [Plan.Eat.Move.com](https://www.planeatmove.com) where you can find additional recipes using greens.

For more information on preserving food, check with your local county Extension office.

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