



Leafy Greens!

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Leafty greens include lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, kale and arugula. They are easy to grow and prepare, and provide a wide variety of nutrients.

Growing

Leafy greens are easy to grow for beginning gardeners. These crops can grow in light shade to full sun in well-drained soil rich in organic matter. Lettuce is planted as a cool-season crop in early spring or late summer, and it will “bolt” (go to seed) in the summer heat.

Although some leafy greens (such as kale and Swiss chard) take significant space, some leafy greens can be grown in small areas and even containers. Lettuce can be harvested at any time that leaves are present; however, small baby leaves are more tender. You also can plant more than one crop of greens during the growing season.

For more information about growing and using leafy greens, see the NDSU Extension Service publication “From Garden to Table: Leafy Greens!” (H1754).

Preparation

To clean leafy greens, rinse them in cool running water. Sometimes soil can be difficult to remove, so place the leafy greens in a bowl of cool water and allow them to sit for a couple of minutes to loosen the soil. Rinse and remove excess moisture by blotting the lettuce with a clean paper towel or by placing the greens in a salad spinner.

Preservation

Green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, can be frozen; however, their structures are altered during the freezing process and they should not be used in salads. Blanch greens (such as spinach) in boiling water for two minutes, then cool, drain and package, leaving ½-inch of head space. Be sure to label the package with the contents and date. Previously frozen green leafy vegetables may be used in soup, casseroles, stir-fries and smoothies. Frozen leafy green vegetables are best if used within six months of freezing.

Nutrition

Dark green leafy vegetables provide a variety of nutrients and fiber. For example, 1 cup of raw spinach has 7 calories, 0 grams (g) fat, 1 g protein, 1 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 24 milligrams sodium. Green leafy vegetables are rich in vitamins A (from the carotenoid natural pigments), C, K and the B vitamin folate. Leafy greens also contain calcium and iron.



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Recipes

Key to abbreviations

c. = cup
tsp. = teaspoon
Tbsp. = tablespoon
oz. = ounce
g = gram
mg = milligram

Baked Kale Chips

1 bunch kale
2 tsp. olive oil (approximately)

Preheat the oven to 200 F. Lightly spray two large baking sheets with cooking spray. Wash and dry kale thoroughly. A salad spinner works well, followed by patting the kale dry with paper towels or a clean dish towel. Cut with kitchen shears or tear leaves from stems and thick center rib in middle of leaves, then tear into large sections.

Toss with 1 teaspoon oil in a large bowl. You may wish to use your fingers to distribute the oil on the leaves. Use slightly more oil if needed. Place in a single layer on baking sheets; use separate oven shelves if needed. Bake about 20 minutes. Then remove the baking sheets from the oven, turn kale chips over and switch shelves if the pans were placed on separate shelves. Check after an additional 10 minutes to determine if they are evenly crisp. Continue baking if needed. The time may vary with your oven. Let chips cool slightly on a baking sheet placed on a cooling rack. Finally, transfer to a bowl and sprinkle lightly with salt, grated Parmesan cheese or your favorite spice if desired.

A nutritional analysis of kale chips is not readily available, but 1 c. of chopped kale has about 35 calories, 1.3 g fiber and 7 g carbohydrate. The sodium value in your chips will vary depending on your choice of seasonings.



Loose-leaf Green Lettuce Salad for One

2 tsp. mild-flavored vegetable oil, such as canola oil
1 tsp. apple cider vinegar
½ tsp. sugar
2 c. loose-leaf lettuce, rinsed thoroughly and drained
Optional add-ins: sliced radishes, finely sliced apples, mandarin oranges, cranberries, chopped pecans

Whisk oil, vinegar and sugar together in a small bowl. Toss with the greens.

Makes one serving. Each serving has 110 calories, 9 g fat, 1 g protein, 6 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 10 mg sodium.

Spinach Salad With Poppy Seed Dressing

8 c. bite-sized pieces of fresh spinach
½ c. julienne strips of jicama or carrot sticks
½ c. sliced fresh radishes
1 medium mango or 3 medium fresh oranges, peeled, seeded and cut up
Optional: ½ hard-cooked egg, chopped, on each serving
Optional: strawberries as garnish

Dressing

2 Tbsp. honey
2 Tbsp. white vinegar
1 Tbsp. yellow mustard
2 Tbsp. finely diced onions
2 tsp. poppy seeds
¼ tsp. salt
⅓ c. canola oil

In tightly covered container, shake all dressing ingredients. In a large bowl, toss dressing and remaining ingredients. Garnish with egg and/or strawberries if desired.

Makes eight servings. With carrot and ½ egg per serving, each serving has 330 calories, 25 g fat, 9 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 320 mg sodium.

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