

## *Winter Greens*

Cooking greens grow well in our winter climate and we will continue getting these greens well into the spring time. We will also be getting beets, turnips and radishes with their greens attached. Use these! When you get your produce home, separate the roots from the greens to preserve their freshness. If this sea of green is leaving you feeling overwhelmed already, don't despair!! Cooking greens are used in all types of cuisine and you should have no trouble incorporating them into almost any dish, once you get the hang of it. Dark, leafy greens are among the most nutritious vegetables available. They are loaded with all sorts of vitamins and minerals and are important sources of iron, calcium and protein in a vegetarian diet. Store greens in a plastic bag or wrapped in paper towels inside a plastic bag in the veggie drawer. Hardier greens like kale and collards will last much longer than more delicate varieties. To clean your greens, fill a large bowl with cool water and completely submerge the greens you want to use. Swishing them around will get rid of dirt hidden in curly parts or along stems. Different varieties of greens are interchangeable in most recipes but will of course yield different results. Just remember to cook tougher leaves longer. The stems of bok choy and chard can almost be considered a different vegetable and will add great celery like crunch to whatever you are cooking.

### **Bitter Greens**

Don't let the word bitter turn you off, rarely are these greens truly bitter when fresh and in season. This category includes hearty and thick leaved kale and collard greens. Dandelion and escarole are also in this category, but with tender leaves and a much more pronounced flavor. These greens are best in hearty, long cooking recipes like soups and stews, though, they are great quickly sautéed as well. Bitter greens are perfect for Italian and Greek recipes. They are good in tomato based dishes. Cheese, butter and cream will help to mellow their bitterness. Also, you may want to add a dash of vinegar or squeeze of lemon to whatever you cook with these green, as the acid really balances the flavor. Winter squash or sweet potatoes can provide a complementary sweetness.

### **Spicy Greens**

Mustard greens, turnip greens and arugula are relatively spicy greens that can sometimes be extremely pungent. The young leaves are good raw but the flavor intensifies with age and you will usually want to cook larger leaves. If you have an especially mustardy bunch, blanching the leaves in boiling water, followed by a dunk in cold water, will remove some of the spiciness before you proceed with your recipe. Many recipes for mustard greens call for fatty cuts of pork to smooth out the flavor. Using cream or butter (or even mayonnaise!) will work equally well to mellow and meld the taste with the other ingredients in the dish. Strong spices such as ginger, chilies and curry are good with these greens. As with bitter greens, the sweetness of winter squash or sweet potato is a good complement to the flavor of spicy greens.

## **Asian Greens**

These greens, like bok choy, tat tsoi and mibuna, range in flavor but tend to have a mildly bitter, spicy cabbage taste. Many of them have dense, watery stems that should not be removed, but enjoyed along with the leaves. Since they are generally milder than other types of greens, they are good in lighter dishes and broth based soups. Asian ingredients like miso, soy sauce, sesame oil and coconut milk are great flavors for these types of greens. Freshly grated ginger, garlic and red chile flakes are the perfect combination of spices with any of these greens.

## **Mild Greens**

These greens usually only taste, well, *green*. Spinach and chard have mild flavors and are extremely versatile. Most varieties of baby greens are mild, as well, developing their unique taste as they mature. Unless a recipe, like creamed spinach or saag, specifically calls for a long cooking time, only add these greens in the last few minutes of cooking.

## **Recipe Ideas**

The basic cooking method for any side of greens is to toss clean, still damp leaves into a hot, oiled skillet (along with garlic for the best flavor) and stir until wilted. Season with salt and pepper or soy sauce and serve! While a side of greens is good, they are easily incorporated into main dish meals. They are highlighted in recipes from almost every cuisine. The different varieties are somewhat interchangeable; each type of green has a distinct taste and texture that will work best with certain flavors. Each idea below has suggestions of what greens might work best in that recipe, but feel free to experiment.

### ***Greek***

--Spanikopita is one of the best ways to use up lots of greens. It is the traditional Greek pie stuffed with sautéed greens. You can use store bought puff pastry or phyllo dough, or homemade or store bought pie crust. Make individual handheld pies or full size pies. Cook two, three, even four bunches of cleaned, chopped greens with chopped onion and nutmeg. Drain any excess moisture from greens before stuffing the pies. You can add any other number of fillings that interest you. Chopped hard-boiled egg, cooked ground beef, raisins, pine nuts or feta cheese are all good. Bake according to pastry directions. Best with kale, chard, arugula, braising greens.

--Make a Greek macaroni and cheese. Cook sliced onion, nutmeg, cinnamon and oregano. Add cleaned, chopped greens and sauté until tender. Toss with cooked penne pasta and goat cheese. OR, add ground beef or lentils cooked in tomato sauce to the greens mixture, layer in a casserole dish with penne pasta and cover with a quick béchamel sauce. Sprinkle with more nutmeg and parmesan cheese and bake until golden. Best with bitter greens like dandelion or escarole.

### ***Italian***

--Stir greens into your favorite Italian pasta recipe. Greens are great in tomato based sauces as well as cream or cheese based dishes. For an easy meal, simply sauté greens with garlic and red pepper and toss with cooked pasta and parmesan cheese (if desired). Adding capers or olives and a dash of balsamic vinegar will provide extra flavor to balance any bitterness. Use whole wheat pasta and consider adding nuts for an extra hearty meal. Best with dandelion, arugula or kale.

--White bean soup with Italian sausage is a classic dish that can use lots of greens. If you don't eat meat, just use sausage herbs like fennel, thyme, red pepper and paprika. You can make a creamy, potato based stew or a brothy soup, the main ingredients here are the flavorful herbs and spices, white beans and cooking greens. Best with kale, collards or chard.

### ***Caribbean***

--Make a traditional Caribbean stew using sweet potatoes or winter squash and black or red beans. Simmer cooked beans and large cubes of sweet potatoes or squash in one or two cups of broth. Season the stew with onion, thyme, allspice, cumin and coriander. Add chopped greens halfway through cooking (about 20 minutes). Serve over cooked grains or wrapped in flour tortilla. Best with mustard, kale or collards.

### ***Indian***

--Make an Indian style stew using delicious curry spices. Quickly sauté freshly grated ginger, chopped onions, cumin, and garam masala in hot oil, stirring until fragrant. Add chopped potatoes and cooked garbanzo beans, and simmer together with about one cup of water. When potatoes are almost tender add chopped greens and cover. When greens and potatoes are cooked through, remove the dish from the heat and add yogurt and/or butter for creaminess. If you don't want to use dairy, substitute one cup of coconut milk for the water when simmering the stew. Serve over rice. Best with mustard, collards or spinach.

### ***Japanese***

--Miso soup is always better with handfuls of greens added. Other ingredients could include tofu, carrots, radishes, mushrooms, ginger, garlic and udon or soba noodles. Simmer the soup until all the ingredients are cooked to your liking. Turn off heat, and remove about one cup of broth from pot. Stir together with a few tablespoons of miso paste to dissolve. Return miso mixture to pot, stir together, and serve. Best with bok choy, tatsoi or spinach.

--Make creamy sesame greens. Begin by blanching whole leaves in boiling water for about 15 seconds. Remove the greens from the water and dunk in cold water to cool. Stack several leaves and roll them up like a cigar. Cut the roll into very fine ribbons. Make a mixture of about 2 tablespoons of tahini and 1 tablespoon of miso, adding water if needed to thin enough to coat greens. Toss everything together, sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve at room temperature. Best with tatsoi, spinach, dandelion.

## ***Chinese***

--Stir fry greens in ginger, soy sauce, sesame oil, chile and garlic (adding a bit of honey or sugar is nice, too). This is a great recipe for Asian greens with thick stems. Baby bok choy are particularly good, stir frying them whole or cut in half, makes a nice presentation. Serve over rice. Best with tatsoi or bok choy.

## **Raw Recipes**

While many people will find mustard greens too strong to eat raw, most other *cooking greens* work quite well in raw recipes. Thick leaved varieties like kale and collards may need to be chopped very finely or tossed with salt and bruised slightly to make the taste and texture palatable. If you plan on making salads with cooking greens, use highly seasoned dressings (or other ingredients like parmesan cheese) that will stand up to their relatively assertive flavors. Here are a few raw recipe ideas.

### **Bruised Greens and Sunflower Seeds**

Remove stems from a bunch of kale or collard greens. Wash thoroughly and, with water still on leaves, sprinkle with salt and squeeze and tear greens into small pieces. Make a dressing by blending onion, curry powder and lemon together. Pour over greens and sprinkle with sunflower seeds. Add cooked or sprouted grains or beans if you like. This salad is best after marinating for at least a few hours.

### **Ginger Greens**

Use dragon mix, or the leaves of tatsoi or spinach for this recipe. Grate about 2 inches of fresh ginger. Mix together with a few cloves or minced garlic, a couple dashes of toasted sesame oil, a drizzle of soy sauce, a sprinkle of red chile flakes, and about 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar. Toss together with greens and serve immediately.

### **Thai Peanut Greens**

Use pre-made Thai peanut sauce or make your own. Cook and drain thin rice noodles. Cut a few carrots and radishes into slivers. Clean and chop a bunch of greens (dragon mix, spinach or tatsoi). Toss ingredients together and garnish with chopped peanuts and green onions.

### **Balsamic Wilted Greens**

Sauté a handful of chopped onion in 1 tablespoon of olive oil until beginning to brown. Add 1 tablespoon of balsamic vinegar and whatever herbs you like and heat until beginning to bubble. Pour mixture over bowlful of clean, chopped greens (spinach, chard or dandelion are good) and toss quickly. Garnish with chopped pecans and apples.