

The Health Benefits of Dark Green Leafy Vegetables

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Dark green leafy vegetables are an excellent source of fiber, folate, and carotenoids.

Key Points

- Dark green leafy vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and carotenoids and act as antioxidants in the body.
- Compounds present in dark green leafy vegetables can inhibit the growth of certain types of cancer.
- Tips on shopping for and cooking green leafy vegetables

Types of Dark Green Leafy Vegetables

- Arugula
- Spinach
- Leaf lettuce
- Kale
- Collard greens
- Romaine lettuce
- Chicory
- Swiss chard

Nutrients

Dark green leafy vegetables are an excellent source of fiber, folate, and carotenoids. These vegetables also contain vitamins C and K and the minerals iron and calcium.

In addition, dark green leafy vegetables act as antioxidants in the body. The substances in dark green leafy vegetables remove free radicals from the body

before they become harmful. Some research has found the carotenoids in dark green leafy vegetables can stop the growth of certain types of breast, skin, lung, and stomach cancer. Some evidence suggests that foods containing folate decrease the risk of pancreatic cancer. Foods containing dietary fiber reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer.

The body needs a little dietary fat to absorb the carotenoids and vitamin K (fat-soluble vitamins) present in green leafy vegetables. Adding one to two teaspoons of olive or canola oil when cooking dark green leafy vegetables increases the absorption of these nutrients. You also can eat uncooked green leafy vegetables with some low-fat salad dressing.

Vegetable Requirements

Each week, teens and adults should eat 1½ to 2 cups of dark green leafy vegetables. Children ages 4 to 8 should eat 1 cup of these vegetables, and children ages 2 to 3 should eat up to a half-cup.

Shopping for Vegetables

Dark green leafy vegetables should be purchased fresh. Most types of dark green leafy vegetables are grown in nearly every part of the United States and are available year round. Choose vegetables with darker green leaves, and look for leaves with no yellowing and that are not wilted.

Storage

Dark green leafy vegetables should be stored at temperatures between 34°-38°F. These vegetables should be stored away from tomatoes, apples, or other fruits that give off ethylene gas, which causes greens to wilt and spoil quickly.

Preparing Vegetables

Wash all vegetables before cutting them up. The dark green leafy vegetables can be placed in a sink filled with cold water for washing. Once placed in the cold water, stir water and greens with hands then remove vegetables. Do not let vegetables soak. Use fresh water each time and repeat until no grit is detected on bottom of sink after the greens have been removed.

After washing, the greens should be dried by placing them vegetables in a colander and blotting them with an absorbent cloth or paper towel.

To prepare spinach, remove the midrib, fold the spinach leaf in half and pull off the stem and midrib. Once the midrib and stem are removed, only the tender leaf should remain. Then wash and dry the spinach leaves. You can now add the spinach leaves to salads or cooked dishes.

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.



Spring Harvest Salad

Salad Ingredients

- 5 cups torn spring leaf lettuce
- 2½ cups spinach leaves
- 1½ cups sliced strawberries
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- ½ cup thinly sliced green onions

Dressing Ingredients

- 4 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2½ tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons Kentucky honey
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup feta cheese crumbles
- ½ cup unsalted sliced almonds

Directions

- Combine leaf lettuce and spinach leaves with sliced strawberries, blueberries and green onion in a large salad bowl.
- Prepare dressing by whisking together the lemon juice, olive oil, balsamic vinegar, Dijon mustard, honey and salt; pour over lettuce mixture and toss to coat.
- Sprinkle salad with feta cheese and sliced almonds.
- Serve immediately.

Yield: Eight 1-cup servings.

Nutrition Analysis: 130 calories, 9 g fat, 1.5 g sat fat, 240 mg sodium, 12 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, 7 g sugar, 3 g protein.

References

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