

# Fresh from the Garden

## LEAFY GREENS

This lesson may be presented as a general overview of greens, or it may be divided into separate, more in depth, lessons.

The material is suitable for both beginning gardeners and gardeners with established productive vegetable gardens.

### Use the lesson to:

- Teach about the health benefits of leafy greens.
- Demonstrate how to properly harvest, store, handle, preserve, and healthfully prepare leafy greens.
- Introduce new and/or unfamiliar vegetables to gardeners in order to encourage them to include more nutrient dense cool weather vegetables in their gardens and their diets.
- Provide more healthful alternatives to traditional cooking techniques or recipes.
- Instruct gardeners how to deal with an overabundant crop.

With minor adaptation, the lesson can be used to introduce the concept of growing vegetables at home to non-gardeners. For example, a container gardening section could be added to demonstrate how to grow leafy greens in a pot or container.

### Key presentation points:

1. Nutrition and health benefits associated with leafy greens and other vegetables
2. Importance of eating fruits and vegetables daily
3. Simple cultivation recommendations
4. Harvesting techniques
5. Washing and storing
6. Healthful cooking/preparation techniques
7. Freezing techniques
8. Recipe demonstration (1 or 2)
9. Recipe

### Additional (optional) points:

- History or origin
- Cultural information
- Interesting or fun facts

### Additional (optional) Activities:

- Compare vegetable name in English with another language appropriate for your audience.
- Taste and compare flavor of different raw greens.
- Sample raw greens with a healthful dip.
- Test audiences' knowledge regarding the difference between a fruit and a vegetable, and into which category selected produce falls.

- Demonstrate how leafy greens may be grown in containers.
- Distribute plants or seeds for immediate planting in the garden.

### Leafy Greens Facts:

- The ancient Greeks and Romans were fond of chard.
- Spinach most likely originated in Persia and was introduced into Europe by the Moors around 1000 A.D.
- Swiss chard and beets are relatives.

### Preparation:

- Review lesson material.
- Review presentation guidelines.
- Review demonstration checklist.
- Review resources for additional presentation information or activities.
- Select seasonal vegetables for demonstration.
- Prepare vegetables for demonstrations, as necessary.
- Prepare recipes or parts of recipes for demonstration and sampling, as necessary.

The following is a suggested script with step-by-step demonstration activities:

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### PRESENTATION: LEAFY GREENS

*Introduce yourself and review what you will be presenting with the audience. Discuss the recipe(s) that you will demonstrate.*

“In many parts of California, we are lucky to be able to grow fresh from the garden vegetables even when the weather turns cool (average temperatures between 55°F to 75°F).

The vegetables grown during the cool seasons are some of the most nutritious. In fact, these vegetables contain more vitamins and minerals per pound in their roots, stems and leaves than do the fruits produced by the warm season plants.

As you plan your cool weather garden, consider planting a variety of leafy greens. They are easy to grow and worth the effort. The plants can be left in the ground and the outer leaves harvested throughout the growing season without injuring the plant.

Leafy greens may also be grown in small spaces, containers, or pots.

Cool weather green leafy vegetables include beet greens, collards, kale, mustard greens, spinach, Swiss chard, and turnip greens.”

☞ Display a variety of washed raw greens. If unavailable, display photographs.

*Note: If you plan to demonstrate 2 recipes, select 1 that requires cooking and 1 that is served raw. Start the recipe that requires cooking at the beginning of the presentation to allow adequate cooking time. The 2<sup>nd</sup> recipe may be prepared at or towards the end of the presentation.*

☞ Display the individual leaves and point out the color, shape and size differences

“Kale and collard greens both belong to the cabbage family. They taste alike, but their leaves are different. Kale has frilly leaves that usually have a blue or gray tint. Collard greens have larger flat, cabbage-like leaves that are a darker shade of green.

Swiss chard and beets are related and there is a similarity in their leaves. Chard has long celery-like stalks, and large dark green leaves that may or may not be crinkled. The stalks and veins in the leaves can be white, red, or even yellow. Beet leaves or greens are much smaller, not crinkled, but like Ruby Chard have red veins and a red stalk.

Spinach leaves are smaller than the others, dark green and more oval shaped.

Mustard greens are a much lighter shade of green and are medium sized with slightly frilled edges.

Greens are excellent sources of vitamins A (beta-carotene) and C, and most contain vitamin K, calcium, and iron. They also contain an abundance of cancer fighting substances called phytochemicals.”

☞ Define phytochemicals and discuss health benefits, if time (see “*Nutrition – the basics*” handout for information on phytochemicals)

“They are low in calories and sodium and are naturally fat and cholesterol free. A 1/2 cup serving of most cooked greens contains only about 20 calories and over 100 different phytochemicals.”

☞ Discuss daily vegetable recommendation (see “*Nutrition – the basics*” handout, in general 2 ½ to 3 cups per day for adults)

☞ Discuss MyPyramid, if time allows

“Dark-colored, strongly flavored greens have more nutritional value than pale, mild salad greens like head lettuce. Therefore, a spinach salad is a better choice than a salad made with iceberg lettuce.

Scientists have found that people who eat dark green leafy vegetables have a lower risk of developing some of the more common cancers. Be sure to eat a dark green leafy vegetable at least 2 to 3 times a week.”

☞ Display and compare the color difference between a lettuce leaf and a spinach leaf

“Kale, collards and mustard greens have a slightly bitter flavor. Larger leaves are usually more bitter. For a milder flavor, harvest when the leaves are small to medium sized.”

- ☞ Distribute a few leaves from each of the different plants
- ☞ Encourage the audience to taste raw greens
- ☞ Discuss and compare the taste of the mild greens versus the bitter greens
- ☞ Have audience vote on whether they like or dislike the bitter greens

“Harvest greens with crisp, tender, and bright green leaves. Discard leaves that are soft or slimy, yellow or dried-out.”

- ☞ Display and compare a green and a yellow leaf

“Greens are best stored unwashed in the refrigerator crisper wrapped in a damp paper towel or in a plastic bag.

Wash leafy greens before cooking by swishing them around in plenty of water. If greens are particularly dirty, change the water and wash a second or even a third time. Lift them out of the water each time so dirt sinks to bottom.”

- ☞ Demonstrate washing technique

“Remove thick, tough or woody stems. Do not discard chard stalks--they may be eaten.”

- ☞ Demonstrate how to separate leaves from stems

“Strip the leaves from the tough stem by either cutting with a sharp knife or tearing. Cut or tear large leaves into pieces. Small leaves may be left whole.

Usually only very young greens are eaten raw. Mature leaves require cooking.

Greens may be steamed, braised, sautéed, or stir-fried. They mix well with pasta, rice and potatoes, and are a good addition to soup. Large leaves may be stuffed like cabbage leaves. Chard ribs or stalks require a little more cooking time than the leaves.

Mild-flavored greens like chard and spinach may be eaten raw--try them in a salad.”

- ☞ Introduce tropical spinach salad recipe

*Note: For some, eating raw spinach is uncommon. The Tropical Spinach Salad recipe is one of the most popular in this vegetable classification, and it is almost always included as one of the demonstrated recipes. It has been a real favorite with children, and they frequently ask for seconds.*

- ☞ Demonstrate recipe

“Spinach contains something called oxalic acid that reduces the absorption of iron by our bodies. Eating a food containing vitamin C along with spinach improves the iron's

absorption. So today, I'm adding some diced oranges to the spinach salad, and orange juice to the dressing.”

- ☞ When recipe is finished and before portioning samples, measure a 1-cup serving and place on a small plate
- ☞ Point out the portion size
- ☞ Distribute a small portion of the recipe for tasting
- ☞ Ask the audience how they like the recipe
- ☞ Encourage participants to replace part or all of the lettuce in their salads with spinach or swiss chard

“Stronger flavored greens like collards, mustard or turnip greens benefit from longer cooking. Cooking in a seasoned broth helps to mellow the flavor of stronger tasting greens.”

- ☞ Introduce the collard greens, swiss chard, or pasta and greens recipe
- ☞ Demonstrate recipe
- ☞ If demonstrating the collard greens or pasta with greens recipes, continue presentation while the greens cook or broth is reduced
- ☞ Stress that homemade or purchased reduced sodium broth is used to cook the greens. Regular broth is too salty when reduced.
- ☞ It may be necessary to use precooked pasta based on demonstration site

“Cooking reduces the volume of leafy greens considerably. They will cook down to about 1/4 of the original volume. One pound of fresh greens will produce about 1 1/2 to 2 cups of cooked.”

- ☞ Point out how much the volume of greens has been reduced since they were put in the pan. Tilt the pan to allow the audience to see.

**COOKING LEAFY GREENS:** (Approximate cooking times)

Beet Greens	5-15 minutes
Chard	10-20 minutes
Collard Greens	10-20 minutes
Kale	10-15 minutes
Spinach	3-10 minutes
Turnip Greens	10-30 minutes

“Season your greens with garlic, onion, diced tomato, lemon or lime juice, vinegar, chilies or hot pepper flakes, and nuts or seeds.

Don't "undo" all the nutritional benefits of eating leafy green vegetables by cooking them with large amounts of fat and salt. Sauces, dressings, and other ingredients will add calories, fat and cholesterol.”

- ☞ When recipe is finished cooking and before portioning samples, measure a ½ cup serving and place on a small plate
- ☞ Point out the portion size
- ☞ Distribute a small portion of the recipe for tasting
- ☞ Ask audience how they like the recipe
- ☞ Conclude presentation

“For good health, it is important to eat a variety of vegetables including leafy greens. Eat vegetables every day—at least 2 ½ to 3 cups, but more is better. The more you eat the better chance you have for a healthy life.

Remember, scientists have found that people who eat dark green leafy vegetables, have a lower risk of developing some of the more common cancers. They recommend that we eat a dark green leafy vegetable at least 2 to 3 times a week.

- ☞ Ask for questions
- ☞ Thank the audience for their participation

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## Recipes

### GOOD HEALTH COLLARD GREENS

4 servings

1 large bunch collard greens, stems removed, in bite-size pieces  
1 tablespoon oil  
2-3 garlic cloves, minced  
1 small onion, chopped  
1/8 teaspoon black pepper  
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)  
1/2-3/4 cup low-sodium, fat-free chicken broth (homemade is preferred)  
2 tablespoons vinegar (or more to taste)

Heat the oil, add the onions and garlic and cook until soft. Be careful not to burn the garlic—it will become bitter.

Add about 1/4 of the greens and toss with onions and garlic. When the greens are wilted, add the remaining greens in batches until all are added and wilted. Mix in the black pepper and the red pepper flakes.

Add the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer the greens for about 15 to 20 minutes, or until tender. The broth should be almost completely reduced.

Sprinkle with vinegar before serving.

## **TROPICAL SPINACH SALAD**

4 servings

Grated rind from 1 or 2 oranges (optional)  
1 or 2 oranges, peeled and cut in chunks  
1/2 medium red onion, sliced  
1 large bunch spinach, large stems removed, in bite-size pieces  
1 cup reduced fat mayonnaise  
1/2 cup orange juice  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger or 1 teaspoon fresh grated ginger  
Salt and pepper to taste

Put spinach, oranges, and onion slices in a bowl. For dressing, mix together mayonnaise orange juice, orange rind, garlic clove, cinnamon, ginger, salt, and pepper. Toss salad with the dressing.

## **SWISS CHARD WITH LIME AND CHILES**

8 servings

2 large bunches Swiss chard, chopped, stalks trimmed and sliced  
2-3 cloves garlic, minced  
1-2 jalapeno or Serrano chiles, minced  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 or 2 teaspoons sugar  
1/2 cup lime juice  
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large pan, heat the oil. Add the sliced stalks, chiles, and garlic and cook until tender, stirring constantly. Add about 1/4 of the chopped chard and toss with chiles, stalks, and garlic. When the leaves are wilted, add the remaining chard in batches until all are added and wilted. Add the sugar, lime juice, salt, and pepper and cook for an additional minute.

## **PASTA WITH GREENS AND FETA CHEESE**

6 servings

1 pound pasta, cooked  
10 cups mixed greens (packed), rinsed and chopped  
3 cups onion, chopped  
3 large cloves garlic, minced  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese  
1/4 pound reduced fat feta cheese, crumbled  
Salt and pepper to taste.

Cook your favorite pasta (penne, bowties, shells, or other small pasta) in boiling water until tender.

While the pasta is cooking, heat the oil in a deep pan. Add the onion and garlic and cook until tender. Add about 1/4 of the greens and toss with onions and garlic. When the greens are wilted, add the remaining greens in batches until all are added and wilted. Cover the pan and cook over medium-low heat for about 10 minutes. When the pasta is ready, drain and add the greens. Add the crumbled cheese and mix the dish thoroughly. Season to taste with salt and pepper and cook for a minute or two over low heat. Add Parmesan, if desired. Serve immediately.

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