Enjoying Florida Greens
Beth Shephard

Turnip Greens, Mustard Greens, Florida Broadleaf, Collards, Kale, Spinach

Nutritionally, these plants are all low in calories. They are loaded with Vitamins A and C and are important for calcium and iron. To maintain their high nutritive value, the key is to cook in a small amount of water. One serving (1/2 cup) greens can supply up to 50 percent of our daily need for vitamin A. Vitamin A is needed for vision, normal growth, reproduction, and a healthy immune system. A serving of greens can provide up to 30 percent of the recommended amount of vitamin C, also known as ascorbic acid, and is beneficial for fighting infections, keeping gums healthy and healing wounds. A serving of greens can provide up to 20% of calcium which is important for bone health.

When cooking greens it is important to cook them until the just become tender. To capture the nutrients that are leached out while cooking, use the liquid in one of the following ways; as a vegetable stock, as a soup, or to dunk corn bread in before eating.

Selection:
Choose greens that are bright green, moist and tender. Leaves that are injured, torn, dried, limp, or yellow are indications of poor quality and usually less nutritious. As greens get older they tend to be tougher and stronger in taste. Choose young greens when possible and prepare within a day or two of purchasing. They can be kept in a ventilated plastic bag in the refrigerator for a week if necessary but may become quite strong and leaves may go limp.

Preparing:
Greens should be washed before use, since they tend to have sand and grit on them. To remove sand and grit, wash in lukewarm water in a large bowl (dirt will sink to the bottom of the bowl). It may take more than one time to remove all of the grit. Once clean, remove, roots and rough ribs as well as the center stalk if it is large or fibrous. If using greens in a salad, thoroughly drain and dry them. This allows salad dressing to stick to the leaves. Mild flavored greens such as chard, kale, or spinach should be steamed until barely tender. Strong flavored greens such as collard, mustard, or turnip need longer cooking in a seasoned broth. Blanching before adding to stews or soups may be necessary to avoid bitterness.

Cooking greens:
In a medium saucepan with ¼ inch of water, add washed greens. If salting, use ½ teaspoon of salt for every pound of greens. Bring to a boil, cover and cook until tender. For leafy greens, cook 1 to 3 minutes, or until they are wilted. For other greens, cook until they are crisp-tender about 5 to 10 minutes. There are many ways to season greens, some traditional seasonings include crisp bacon or left over ham.
Recipes:

**Herbed Greens**
2 lbs. fresh collards, turnip or mustard greens
3 slices lean pork cut in ½ - inch pieces
½ cup boiling water
¼ tsp. salt
½ tsp. ground black pepper
½ tsp. oregano leaves
Wash young greens carefully four or five times.
Cut off root ends and coarse midribs. Place greens in a saucepan. Brown lean pork pieces in a skillet and add to greens. Pour in boiling water. Water can be omitted if greens are very young. Add salt, black pepper and oregano. Cover and cook until greens are tender, 15 to 30 minutes. Cooking time will be less if greens are very young. Cut through greens 2 to 3 times with kitchen shears before serving. Eat at once. Yield: 5 to 6 servings.

**Spiced Mustard Greens**
2 lbs. fresh mustard greens
¼ lb. lean pork pieces
½ cup boiling water
½ tsp mixed pickling spices
1 tsp. sugar
1 tsp. Salt
¼ tsp. pepper
½ small onion, chopped
Wash mustard greens thoroughly. Rinse in clear water and slice. Cut pork in thin slices and brown in a large saucepan. Add hot water and greens. Cover and cook about 15 minutes. Add spices (tied in cheesecloth bag), sugar, salt, pepper, and onions. Cook about 10 minutes longer or until greens are tender. Remove spice bag and serve greens hot. Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

**Spinach with Pecans**
2 lbs. fresh spinach
¼ cup chopped pecans
¼ cup margarine
Juice of ½ lemon
Salt and pepper to taste
Wash spinach and cook for about five minutes. Lightly brown pecans in margarine. Add lemon juice and pour over spinach. Season to taste.

**Spicy Spinach**
2 ½ lbs. spinach
1 clove garlic, pressed
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
¼ tsp. sugar
¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper
1/8 tsp. nutmeg
Place pressed garlic in shallow pan with oil, sugar, pepper, and nutmeg. Wash spinach, chop into small pieces. Place spinach in pan, cover, bring quickly to a boil. Reduce heat and cook gently for 5 minutes.
Spinach Salad
½ lb. fresh spinach leaves ½ head lettuce ½ cup mayonnaise ½ cup plain low-fat yogurt or sour cream
2 Tbsp. vinegar ½ tsp. garlic powder ½ tsp. salt ¼ tsp. black pepper
Wash and dry spinach. Wash lettuce and break into small pieces. Combine mayonnaise, yogurt or sour cream, vinegar and seasoning. Mix lightly with greens just before serving and garnish with cubes of cheese.

Storing:
Greens freeze well but only after being cooked. Leftovers may be stored in the refrigerator for 4-5 days, but if it is going to be longer, freeze in a vapor-proof container. They can last in the freezer up to 12 months. If you are going to freeze before cooking, it is imperative that you blanch the greens prior to freezing or they will become tough and flavorless upon thawing. The blanching time for collard greens is 3 minutes per pound and for all other greens 2 minutes. After blanching, cool, drain, and package, leaving ½-inch headspace.