

Information about the Kentucky State University Cooperative Extension Program



Nutritional and Health Benefits of Leafy Greens

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Introduction and Background

- ❖ Leafy greens are categorized as part of fresh vegetables, known for their green color and tender texture.
- ❖ The history of leafy greens dates back to ancient civilizations, where they became a staple food in the Mediterranean region before spreading across Europe. During European exploration and the transatlantic slave trade, leafy greens were introduced to different parts of the world.
- ❖ In the 16th century, they were brought to the Americas by European settlers and enslaved Africans. Over time, African culinary traditions influenced the preparation of these greens, making them a staple in Southern cuisine. Ultimately, they became an essential part of diets and are now widely consumed throughout the United States due to their versatile culinary uses.
- ❖ Since then, there has been a growing demand for salads and fresh vegetables, which increased the United States' per capita consumption to 155.4 pounds in 2023.
- ❖ Leafy greens are rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other phytonutrients with low calories, all of which contribute to essential health benefits.

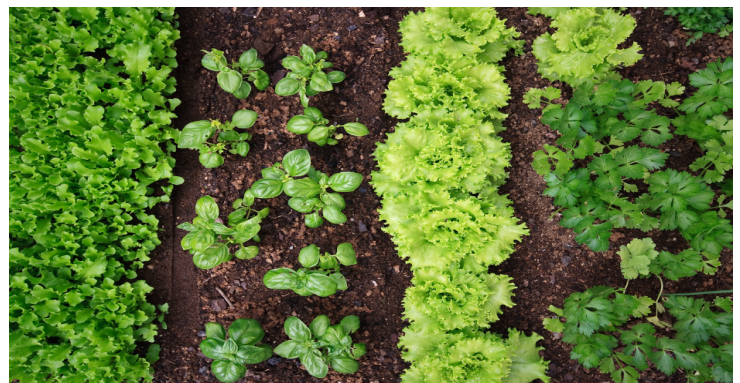


Leafy Green Health Benefits

- ❖ Contain a great amount of essential nutrients
- ❖ Combat cellular damage and support healthy aging
- ❖ Reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease
- ❖ Vital for healthy vision, immunity, bone health, and cell growth
- ❖ Important for healthy muscles, nerve function, and oxygen transport
- ❖ Promote healthy gut bacteria, aiding digestion, and regulating blood sugar levels

Where to Find Leafy Greens

- ❖ Grocery Stores and Supermarkets
- ❖ Online Retailers
- ❖ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- ❖ Farmers' Markets
- ❖ Specialty and Ethnic Markets



Nutritional Benefits of Most Common Leafy Greens

- ❖ *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends increasing average intakes of vegetables to improve human health conditions.
- ❖ Overall, they are rich in vitamins (A, C, E, and K), minerals, fibers, and antioxidants.
- Arugula: Vitamins K, A, C, folate, calcium, antioxidants
- Beet Greens: Vitamins A, C, K, iron, fiber
- Boy choy: Vitamins A, C, K, folate, fiber, calcium
- Collard Greens: Vitamins K, A, C, folate, calcium
- Kale: Vitamins A, C, K, calcium, antioxidants
- Napa (Chinese) cabbage: Vitamins C, K, folate, antioxidants
- Spinach: Vitamins A, C, K, iron, folate, manganese
- Swiss chard: Flavonoids, vitamins K, A, C, magnesium, iron
- Turnip Greens: Vitamins K, A, C, folate, calcium, fiber
- Lettuce: Vitamins K, A, folate, fiber



The USDA recommends adults eat 2-3 servings of vegetables a day, and 2 cups of raw greens make up one serving!

Sources

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Boost Your Health by Adding Leafy Greens to Your Diet!

There are many ways that leafy greens can be incorporated into the diet to make balanced and enjoyable meals.

- ❖ Make a Salad: You can make your delicious salad using different greens of different colors, textures and varieties.
- ❖ Wrap It Up: Make a wrap with tuna, chicken or turkey and add romaine lettuce, spinach, arugula, and other veggies for some extra flavor.
- ❖ Add to Soup: You can add green leaves into your favorite soup.
- ❖ Stir-Fry: You can add your chopped greens to meat or tofu stir-fried recipes
- ❖ Steamed: Steaming your greens until they are slightly soft, and ready to consume
- ❖ In an Omelet: Add steamed greens to your omelet it enhances the taste and nutrients.
- ❖ Smoothies: Greens can be used to make healthy and nutritious smoothies.