

# SPINACH



**SPINACH** is among the most popular dark leafy greens in North America. Its existence was first recorded 2000 years ago in the Middle East and has only been incorporated into the North American diet in the last 600 years. Spinach is a close relative of beets and swiss chard. Due to its low tolerance for hot weather, spinach is one of the first crops to be directly seeded into the ground in early spring. In the Northeast spinach is available from mid-May through June, and then again in mid-September until the first frost.



## STORAGE

- ◆ Store spinach in a **damp towel or an open plastic bag** in the refrigerator drawer. It can last this way for about **one week**. Spinach and other greens maintain their crispness by holding water in their cells. You can sometimes revive wilted leaves by soaking in ice water for 2-3 minutes. But be sure to thoroughly dry the leaves before storing to avoid rotting or wilting.
- ◆ To **freeze**, blanch the spinach for 1-2 minutes. Rinse in cold water to stop the cooking process. Drain and store the leaves in an airtight container or freezer bags until ready for use.

## PREPARATION

- ◆ Rinse the leaves thoroughly in cool water and pat or spin dry. Remove all tough stems and dead leaves.
- ◆ Spinach can be eaten **raw or cooked**. 2 to 3 lbs. of raw leaves will reduce to 2 cups when cooked.
- ◆ Make a spinach **salad** or combine with other salad greens. Try a dressing of lemon juice, olive oil, salt and pepper. Add olives, tomatoes and feta cheese.
- ◆ Add raw to **sandwiches** or bake into **quiche, lasagna, or quesidillas**.
- ◆ **Stir-fry or steam** spinach. Steam 2 pounds for 8-10 minutes. Eat plain or sprinkle with salt, lemon juice and butter as a side dish or an addition to pasta.
- ◆ To maintain the highest amount of nutrients, rinse the leaves but do not dry. Put into a frying pan while still damp. Add herbs and spices and cook 2-3 minutes stirring occasionally. Cover for another 2-3 minutes until dark in color.

### **Nutritional Information**

Spinach is an excellent source of vitamins A, C, K, folate and a good source of potassium and iron. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption. Vitamin A is important in vision, growth and development, skin health, immune function and reproduction. Vitamin K is involved in blood clotting. A healthy diet with enough folate may reduce a woman's risk of having a child with certain birth defects of the brain or spinal chord. Diets containing foods that are a good source of potassium and that are low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. Iron is important for healthy blood cells. Inadequate iron intake can lead to anemia. Spinach contains oxalic acid which can inhibit the absorption of calcium.

# Spinach Recipes

## Spinach Pesto

- 4 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts
- 1 cup fresh basil leaves or 2 tablespoons dried
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice



Thoroughly wash and dry the spinach and basil. In a blender or food processor combine a few spinach leaves, garlic, pine nuts, basil, parsley and a few tablespoons of oil. Pulse blend until the ingredients are chopped and mixed. If the blender is not blending, try adding a few tablespoons of water and a dash more oil. Continue adding spinach leaves a few at a time with some oil into the blender. It may help to use a rubber spatula to scrape down the sides of the blender and combine the ingredients. Once all of the spinach and oil has been blended, add the cheese, salt and lemon juice. Blend until smooth. Serve on top of pasta or chicken. Use it as a spread or dip. Try the pesto as a spread on sandwiches.

Recipe adapted from recipe found on [www.southernfood.about.com](http://www.southernfood.about.com).

## Stir Fried Curried Spinach

- 4 cups fresh spinach
- 1/2 onion chopped
- 2 garlic cloves crushed or chopped
- 3 Tablespoons olive oil
- curry spices to taste
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (or 1-2 teaspoons soy sauce)
- 1/4 cup sunflower seeds without the shell (optional)



Thoroughly wash and dry spinach and tear leaves into small pieces. Remove stems and dead leaves and set aside. In a small frying pan heat 1 tablespoon of oil. Add sunflower seeds and stir constantly until seeds start to turn a light brown color. Remove from heat and set aside. In a frying pan, wok or large pot, sauté onions, garlic and spices in the olive oil on medium heat until onions are translucent. Add spinach and raisins. After a few minutes add the salt or soy sauce. Cover and let cook, stirring often, until spinach is soft and tender. Make sure spinach does not burn or stick to the bottom of the pot. Remove from heat. Add sunflower seeds. Serve as a side dish and enjoy.

Recipe contributed by Abby Bell, Just Food Intern, 2003

## Spinach Salad

- 1 or 2 handfuls of walnuts
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- minced garlic to taste
- dry mustard to taste
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon cottage cheese
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 bunch spinach cleaned and stemmed
- 2 medium tomatoes
- 1/2 onion chopped
- feta cheese



In a dry skillet, toast walnuts stirring often until they begin to darken slightly and are fragrant. Set aside to cool. In a small bowl combine sugar, vinegar, garlic, mustard, salt, pepper and cottage cheese. Whisk in oil in a thin stream. Toss with spinach, chopped tomato, onion, and walnuts. Sprinkle feta on top. Makes 4 servings.

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