

Dress Up Greens For National Salad Month

May is the perfect month to celebrate fresh greens! Crisp salads are perfect for cooling off when the heat turns up! With the warmer weather here, there is no better time to rest your oven and enjoy a lighter meal. When we typically think of “salad,” we think of a traditional side salad or green salad. I encourage you to experiment—do not forget that salads include fruit and can be expanded to include protein, which makes delicious entrees.

From iceberg lettuce, spinach, and romaine to kale, chard, and a spring mix of tender greens, salad can be built out of endless creative combinations. It can complement a meal of spaghetti and meatballs. It can also be a meal on its own, but creating the perfect salad starts with quality, authentic ingredients.

Just like any other food, leafy greens need to be handled safely. This is important as some foodborne illnesses have been related to fresh greens. Rinsing the greens is a helpful way of removing some of the dirt and germs. This step and cooking are considered safer alternatives for vegetables with a higher risk of foodborne illness.

It is also important to make sure the greens are properly refrigerated. Perishable foods, including pre-washed or pre-cut produce and cooked vegetables and fruit, should be refrigerated within 2 hours. If the temperature is above 90°F, everything should be refrigerated within 1 hour.

No matter what you make, you should always start by washing your hands for 20 seconds or more with soap and warm water.

Next, cut off any damaged areas on the leaves or stems. If something seems rotten, throw it away. Avoid cross-contamination by using a clean cutting board and a knife to chop or shred the greens after washing and drying.

Some leafy greens are labeled “pre-washed” or “ready-to-eat,” which means you will not need to wash them.

Some lettuce, like iceberg, has a core. This core should be removed before the lettuce is washed.

Loose leaves are most easily washed in a colander or salad spinner. Toss the greens around under running water and repeat. One washing method to avoid is a sink filled with water.

It is important never to use bleach, detergent, or soap when washing leafy greens. These types of products can leave residues that should not be consumed. The USDA does not recommend using commercial produce washes because they can also leave a residue.

After washing, it is important to help remove excess liquid by patting the leafy greens with paper towels or a clean kitchen towel. You may also use a salad spinner.

When to wash greens

After bringing the greens home, the main goal is to absorb as much excess moisture as possible. Moisture on the greens causes the leaves to turn slimy and rot. With that in mind, wait to wash the greens until you are ready to use them.

When you bring the greens home from the store, they will probably be relatively dry. It is important to keep them dry by choosing the best storage to promote good airflow around the leaves.

If you choose to use a container different than what the leaves came in, make sure to add them without packing them too tightly. Airflow is important! Next, place a paper towel on top, close the lid, and place the container in the fridge. If you prefer zip lock bags, you can use them as well.

Beyond the leafy part of the salad, the crisp vegetables, proteins, flavorful cheeses, herbs, berries, grains, and nuts make salads exciting and healthy. If we do not overindulge in cheese and fatty meats, the dressing usually causes our salad downfall.

Serve salad with every meal, even breakfast. Fruit salad is a bright way to start the morning. Salads are an excellent way to help get your 5 servings of fruit and vegetables daily. These provided tips should help you get the maximum salad-eating this month!

(Sources: www.eatright.org; www.fda.gov; fruitsandveggies.org; www.nifa.usda.gov)