

## **Eat More Spinach**

Spinach is truly a gem in the world of leafy greens. This superfood is widely appreciated for its abundant nutritional benefits but is also a mainstay in many kitchens due to its versatility, pleasantly subtle flavor, and silky-smooth texture.

There are two basic types of spinach: savoy and flat-leaf. When you buy bunched, fresh spinach at the grocery store, it's usually savoy spinach. The leaves of savoy spinach are typically wrinkled and have a curly appearance. Flat spinach is often sold in bags, cans, or frozen form. Baby spinach is simply flat spinach that farmers harvest during the early stages of the plant's growth.

Look for spinach with fresh, vibrant green leaves that are not wilted, discolored, or overly bruised. Avoid any spinach with yellow or brown spots, as these are signs of age and decay.

Before eating, always wash the spinach thoroughly under cold running water to remove any dirt or potential pesticides unless it is pre-washed and ready to eat.

Fresh spinach can be stored in the refrigerator for about a week. After that, it may start to wilt or become slimy. Always discard any spinach that has a bad smell, as this is also a clear indication that it has spoiled.

Spinach is low in calories but high in vitamins, nutrients, and filling fiber. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one cup of raw spinach has only 7 calories. Spinach is rich in many nutrients, including vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin K, iron, folate, and potassium. Raw and cooked spinach have similar nutritional value.

When enjoyed raw, spinach has a clean, crisp taste that is slightly sweet with a mild, somewhat earthy undertone. This subtle flavor profile allows it to pair well with most ingredients without overpowering them, making it a popular choice for salads and smoothies. Raw spinach also has a refreshing crunch when the stems are left on, adding a bit of texture to dishes.

Once cooked, spinach undergoes a transformation that brings out a slightly different taste profile. Primarily, the sweetness recedes, allowing earthy, more complex flavors to take the lead. Spinach's mild bitterness also tends to mellow when it's cooked, making it more palatable for those who may be sensitive to bitter flavors.

The texture of cooked spinach is also drastically different from its raw form, losing its crunch and becoming softer, silkier, and almost creamy, which can often add a unique and pleasing mouthfeel to various dishes. Whether it's wilted in a sauté, baked into a casserole or quiche, stirred into a skillet dinner, or simmered in a soup, cooked spinach infuses dishes with its distinct yet subtle flavor.

Spinach can be prepared in various ways, each enhancing its flavor and nutritional profile in distinct ways. Its mild taste pairs well with a range of foods, including eggs, pasta, grains, fish, poultry, and other vegetables.

To freeze fresh spinach, wash it thoroughly and cut off woody stems. Blanch (or dip) in boiling water for 2 minutes and immediately chill in ice-cold water. Drain off excess moisture, pack into airtight freezer containers or bags, label and date them, and place them in the freezer immediately. Spinach can also be canned. For procedures and processing times, consult the "Preserving Food in Wyoming" publication or your local University Extension office.

Spinach is a nutritious, leafy green. Whether it's the star of the show or a valuable player, this versatile leafy vegetable can do it all.