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## CELEBRATE ST. PATRICK'S DAY WITH EXTRA GREEN

This time of year, the color green starts to make a reappearance into my life and thoughts. At local stores (or at my mother's), you can see green and gold decorations for the upcoming St. Patrick's Day. Even at my home, I am starting to see more green! Spring is around the corner and some of the plants in my garden have tentative green shoots peeking through the soil. Although I will admit I am worried they are coming out a little early and might have to deal with an early spring frost, it is still encouraging to see so much greenery and life! March is also National Nutrition Month. When I think about the color green and the importance of good nutrition, my mind jumps to leafy green vegetables. Although leafy greens might not make it on your list of favorite foods, they are nutritional superstars. So, in honor of Spring and St. Patrick's Day, I'm going to try to persuade you to add some of these greens to your plate.

When I say leafy greens, I am talking about things like spinach, kale, collards, broccoli, bok choy, arugula, and more! If you go to <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/vegetables>, you can learn more about which vegetables are included in this group and how much you need to eat to get one of your five recommended servings. As I mentioned, these leafy greens are packed with nutrition. According to [information from the US Department of Agriculture](#), leafy greens are full of vitamins such as A, B, C, E, and K. These vitamins are important for your body and help everything from keeping your bones strong to preventing infections. Leafy greens also contain antioxidants, which help protect your cells and can help lower your risk of certain cancers, heart disease or other chronic diseases. Finally, leafy greens are not high in calories, so they provide your body with nutrition it needs without providing calories you might not need.

Unfortunately, leafy greens have made the news in recent years for good and bad reasons. The good end of things I mentioned above, we are always seeing new research about the health benefits of leafy greens. However, we have also seen recalls of certain leafy greens due to food safety concerns. To get some information about what has been going on with leafy greens and food safety, I reached out to my colleague with University of Maryland Extension, [Dr. Shauna Henley](#). Dr. Henley is a food safety expert who works as an Extension Educator in Baltimore County, where she does research and teaches about all things food safety and food preservation.

She let me know that, lately, we have been seeing outbreaks connected to leafy greens, whole heads of romaine, and ready-to-eat leafy greens products. Ready-to-eat means the greens are cleaned, chopped, and packaged into products you can eat right away, like bagged salads. Dr. Henley mentioned that your food safety risk depends on things like age (those under 5 years or older than 65 years are at higher risk) and health status (people who are pregnant or immunocompromised are at higher risk). Some people at high

risk might avoid foods like this to make sure they don't get sick. But, if you are looking to reduce your risk, you can also cook your greens because heating them will kill harmful bacteria (pathogens). It might sound strange, but there are recipes out there like this one for [sautéed romaine lettuce](#) from Martha Stewart. You can also buy things like heads of cabbage or lettuce where you can remove the outside layers and wash the inside layers right before eating raw, although heating will be more effective. She also mentioned that the recent outbreaks have come from large processing facilities, so it might reduce your risk to head to a local farmers market where you can purchase greens from a smaller, local farm. Keep in mind, no matter where you get your produce, you still need to [wash it right before eating or cooking!](#) Remember foodborne pathogens do not discriminate against farm size, location or farming practices, but these are the characteristics of leafy green related outbreaks from December 2021 to March 2022.

In the Frederick area, many of our farmers markets are still closed for the season, but look for them to start opening up in the next month or two. Homegrown Frederick has great information about accessing local produce and even has a section of their website with all the details about local farmers markets. You can check it out at <https://www.homegrownfrederick.com/farmers-markets>, so keep your eye out for these to start opening as we get into spring. For those outside Frederick County, check out <https://marylandsbest.net/> for information on great Maryland products!

Personally, I find myself heating greens like this for a soup or stir-fry! They are both great recipes for finding ways to get some extra greens into your diet. When I am craving something comforting, I often grab a can of beef vegetable soup and throw in a couple handfuls of spinach. It is a quick and easy way for me to have a nutritious meal that I actually enjoy! You'll see, that spinach in soup is somewhat of a theme for me, as I am including a recipe for another soup I make frequently that includes spinach. I started making this recipe in college because it was cheap. I can still buy all the ingredients for the soup for under \$10, although sometimes it is closer to \$15 if I want to add parmesan cheese and a piece of toasted bread. So, even if you are not a big salad fan, there are still plenty of ways to incorporate leafy greens into your diet.

If you need some ideas for how to enjoy leafy greens, here are some great recipes (including one that has gone viral on social media where people swear they like it better than guacamole!). I encourage you to find a way you and your family can enjoy some leafy greens, both to celebrate the season and to benefit your health. If you need more recipe ideas, University of Maryland Extension has some great ones! You can check them out at <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/family-consumer-sciences/snap-ed/eat-smart/recipes>

## **GREEN GODDESS SALAD**

This recipe is from the CEO of Baked by Melissa and has garnered a ton of fans online.

### ***Salad Base***

- 1 small head green cabbage (or iceberg lettuce), finely diced
- 3-4 cucumbers, finely diced
- 1/4 cup chives, finely diced
- 1 bundle green onion or scallions

## **GREEN GODDESS SALAD (continued)**

### ***Green Goddess Dressing***

Juice of 2 lemons

1/4 cup olive oil

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

2 cloves garlic

1 small shallot

1/4 cup walnuts, cashews or nut of choice

1 cup fresh torn basil leaves

1 cup fresh spinach

1/3 cup nutritional yeast

1 teaspoon salt

1/3 cup chives (optional)

Place all salad ingredients in a big bowl.

Add all liquid dressing ingredients into a blender, then add the dry dressing ingredients and blend until smooth.

Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Enjoy!

Serves 4. Find this recipe at <https://www.today.com/recipes/baked-melissa-s-green-goddess-salad-recipe-t237715>

## **SIMPLE GREEN SMOOTHIE**

1 cup kale or spinach

1 banana, medium

1 cup low fat milk (optional coconut milk or almond milk)

1 cup plain yogurt

1 apple, medium (cored and sliced)

1 cup frozen fruit (all one fruit or a combination of mixed frozen fruit)

Flax seeds, 1 Tablespoon (optional)

Chia seeds, 1 Tablespoon (optional)

In a blender, blend the kale or spinach and the liquid of your choice. Add in the rest of the ingredients, blending after each item. Serve and enjoy, cold.

Reserve the leftover smoothie in the refrigerator for later in the day or the next day.

Serves 2.

Find this recipe at <https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/simple-green-smoothie>

## **SPINACH, CHICKPEA, AND TOMATO SOUP**

2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 cup onions, diced  
2 cloves of garlic, minced  
1 (28 oz.) can diced tomatoes (2 small cans or one large can)  
1 (28 oz.) can chickpeas, drained (2 small cans or one large can)  
2 cups chicken stock (you can also use vegetable stock)  
1 package (10 oz.) frozen spinach  
1 tablespoon Italian seasoning

Optional: Parmesan cheese for topping and multigrain bread (I like to toast it and dip it in the soup)

Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onions and garlic and cook until softened, about 5 minutes.

Add tomatoes, chickpeas, spinach, stock, and Italian seasoning. Then, bring to a simmer, cover and let simmer for about 30 minutes

Serve and enjoy hot! Top with parmesan cheese and toast, if desired. Serves 6

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