

# Leafy Greens

## Growing & Harvesting

**Grow.** Several leafy greens are grown as spring and fall crops in Montana. Plant initial crop in spring when soil temperatures reach a minimum of 35°F (spinach, lettuce, arugula), 40°F (chard) or 50°F (mustard). Small seeded greens such as lettuce and arugula can be directly sown and do not require soil cover to germinate. Larger seeds such as spinach and chard can be covered with ¼-inch of soil. Plants should be thinned to approximately 2-6 inch spacing in rows 12-24 inches apart. Most leafy greens will create a seed stalk as summer temperatures increase. A late season crop can be achieved by planting 6 to 8 weeks prior to the first fall frost. Visit [www.msuextension.org](http://www.msuextension.org) for more information or contact your Extension office.

**Harvest.** Depending on species and variety, leafy greens can be harvested at 40-50 days maturity either by removing the whole plant at soil level or selecting older leaves, allowing the remaining leaves to mature for future harvests. Heading and semi-heading lettuce varieties take several more days to mature and are harvested as whole plants.

## Selection

Choose brightly colored greens with firm, crispy leaves. Avoid dried-out, yellow, wilted, dull-looking or slimy leaves. Young tender leaves are preferred. Once plants have bolted, leaves tend to be tough and bitter. Early harvest ensures the best flavor.

## Storage

Store unwashed greens in a bag in the coolest part of the refrigerator for up to one week.

## Nutrition Information

Greens are cholesterol free and low in calories and sodium. Most of these plants are referred to as super foods because they contain phytochemicals, which promote long term health as part of a nutritious diet. They are also good sources of Vitamin A, C, K, protein and fiber. Greens are high in folate, a nutrient important for fetal development and calcium.

## Uses

Prior to preparing, wash greens thoroughly in cool running water. Cooked greens reduce in size by 75% compared to fresh greens.

**Blanch or Boil.** Remove dried or thick stems. Cover the raw greens with water and bring to a boil. Add greens and blanch: collard, 8-15 minutes; beet, turnip, and mustard greens, 5-8 minutes; chard, 2-4 minutes; baby greens, less than a minute. Cook until desired tenderness.

**Braise.** Cut large greens and keep small greens whole. Remove dried or thick stems. Drizzle cooking oil in a heated pan, add seasonings if desired. Cook greens over low heat for about 20 minutes or until desired tenderness. This method is ideal for collards, chard, and kale.

**Salad.** Add a variety of raw greens to salads for added flavor, texture, and visual appeal. To serve tougher greens raw, massage the finely cut greens with acidic dressing. This will tenderize the greens and enhance the flavor.

**Sauté.** Cut large greens and keep small greens whole. Remove dried or thick stems. Drizzle cooking oil in a heated pan, add seasonings if desired. Cook greens by stirring over high heat until desired tenderness, about 5-8 minutes. This method is ideal for spinach, collards, chard, bok choy, and mustard greens.

**Season.** To enhance flavor, experiment with low-sodium seasonings such as basil, bay leaf, celery, seed, garlic, oregano, tarragon, or thyme.

**Soup or Entrée.** Add greens to soups and entrees such as lasagna, quiche, or pizza.

**Steam.** Remove dried or thick stems. Place greens in a pan in a steam rack with a small amount of water and seasonings if desired. Cook on medium heat for 2-4 minutes (depending on size and age of greens), or until desired tenderness.



## Food Safety Tips

1. **Clean.** Wash hands and food contact surfaces often.
2. **Chill.** Keep produce and food cool and chill promptly.
3. **Separate.** Keep produce and food separate from raw meats and eggs.
4. **Cook.** Cook food to the safe temperature.

Questions? Click on [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

# Preparation: Step-by-Step



Wash hands. Thoroughly rinse greens to remove any dirt. Dry with a towel or in a salad spinner. Rewash greens if needed.



Cut off end of stems using a knife. For large greens, such as chard and collards, slice on both sides of the stem to remove. Remove the stem and discard.



Stack greens and slice into 1/4- to 1/2 inch sections.



For small or delicate greens, such as lettuce, spinach and mustard greens, can be hand torn or left whole.

## For More Information:

Montana State University Extension: [www.msuextension.org](http://www.msuextension.org)  
MSU Extension Master Gardener: [www.mtmastergardener.org](http://www.mtmastergardener.org)  
MSU Extension Food and Nutrition: [www.msuextension.org/nutrition](http://www.msuextension.org/nutrition)  
MSU Extension Nutrition Education Programs: [www.buyeatlivebetter.org](http://www.buyeatlivebetter.org)

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## Information Courtesy of:

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