

Daily Union Article

Saturday, September 17, 2016

Title: Facts about Kale

I have recently had a few questions inquiring basic information and uses for ***kale***. Growing in popularity in our region, this leafy vegetable has been cultivated for over 2,000 years and, prior to the Middle Ages, was the most widely eaten vegetable in Europe. Kale is a dark green leafy plant from the same plant species as cabbage, kohlrabi, cauliflower, broccoli, and Brussel sprouts. It thrives in colder regions because of its resistance to frost.

Kale is a nutrient rich vegetable packed with Vitamins A, C, K and B6 and contains significant amounts of potassium, calcium, iron and manganese (see inset for a quick reference to the nutritional role of these important vitamins and minerals.) It is also a good source of fiber and contains no cholesterol. Additionally, it has few calories and sodium, making kale a great choice for those desiring to maintain a healthy diet.

When choosing kale from the farmer's market or produce section in the grocery store, look for small to medium-sized leaves with a dark green appearance. Brown, yellow, wilted or slimy leaves are an indication that the vegetable is well past its prime. At home, store unwashed kale in a bag in the coolest part of the refrigerator. It is best to use kale in 3 – 5 days, but can held up to 2-3 weeks if properly stored.

Kale can be used in a variety of ways. Before use, wash the greens thoroughly. When cooked, kale will reduce in size by 75% compared to eating it fresh. In a fact sheet provided by Montana State University Extension, the following cooking techniques are offered for this nutrient rich vegetable:

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.

Drizzle cooking oil in a heated pan, add seasonings if desired. Cook greens by searing 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

Source: Montana State University Extension publication EB0212 by Katelyn Andersen.

Perhaps you have never tried kale, but if you like cabbage, broccoli or some of the other vegetables in this plant family, you might be surprised by this healthy leafy vegetable. Adding more plants to your plate is a great way to expand your palate while improving your nutrient intake.

For more information on food preparation and healthy eating habits, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

Nutrient Information Inset – referred to in ¶2

Nutrient	Nutritional Role
Vitamin A	Helps form and maintain healthy teeth, skeletal and soft tissues, mucus membranes and skin. Promotes good vision.
Vitamin C (ascorbic acid)	Essential for normal growth and development as well as repair of tissues in all parts of the body. Serves as an antioxidant.
Vitamin K	Known as the clotting vitamin because without it blood would not clot.
B6 (pyridoxine)	Helps the body make antibodies which are needed to fight many diseases. Maintains normal nerve function. Makes hemoglobin and breaks down proteins. Keeps blood sugar in normal ranges.

Potassium	Builds proteins and breaks down carbohydrates for use in the body. Builds muscle and maintains normal body growth. Controls the electrical activity of the heart and controls the acid-base balance in the body.
Calcium	Helps form and maintain healthy teeth and bones. Aids in blood clotting and in releasing hormones and other chemicals in the body. When proper levels of calcium in the body are maintained over a lifetime, calcium can help prevent osteoporosis.
Iron	Needed to make oxygen-carrying proteins hemoglobin and myoglobin. Hemoglobin is found in red blood cells and myoglobin is found in muscles.
Manganese	Needed in micro amounts, manganese is involved in chemical processes in the body, including processing of cholesterol, carbohydrates, and protein.
Fiber	Dietary fiber adds bulk to your diet, can help with weight control, aids digestion, and helps prevent constipation.

Source: National Institute of Health: U.S. National Library of Medicine- Nutrient Fact Sheets