



TENDER GREENS

What is It?

- Tender greens are delicate leafy green vegetables with mild to slightly spicy flavor.
- Tender greens are often eaten raw but sometimes they are heated just enough to make them soft, a process called “wilting.”
- Tender greens include baby spinach, arugula, watercress, mizuna, and mache (also called lamb’s lettuce or corn salad), among others.
- Arugula is called “rocket” in many other parts of the world. It is believed that both words “arugula” and “rocket” are derived from the same Latin name, “eruca.” Over time the names evolved differently across northern Europe and southern Europe, forming two completely different words.
- The name spinach came from the Persian word “ispanai” which means “green hand.”
- While it originated in Europe and China, watercress has become naturalized in the United States and can often be found growing around cold spring water.
- Mizuna was successfully grown on the international space station in 2019.

Grow It

Tender greens are typically fast growers and thrive in cool temperatures. They can be planted as a mix or individually.

Greens are perfect for growing in school gardens! Growing greens in the fall is ideal because harvesting fits well with the academic calendar, but greens can be grown in the spring as well. Greens grown in the heat of summer can taste bitter. Most tender greens are quick growing, frost-tolerant, and easy to grow. Plant a variety of spinach, mizuna, watercress, arugula, and mache, or look for a tender green, mesclun, or spring salad seed mix. These mixes may also include lettuce. Plant seeds directly in the garden.

Harvest tender greens whenever the leaves are large enough to use, about three to six inches. Young leaves generally have a milder flavor. Cut just the leaves and let roots stay in place. They will regrow to allow for multiple harvests. Continue harvesting until plants begin to seed or become too spicy to eat.





Leafy Green Exploration

Learn It

K–4th Grade

Objectives

- Use scientific inquiry to observe and learn about several varieties of leafy greens.
- Create a line plot to record the results of a class tasting.

Materials

- Spinach, arugula, and/or other tender green seed packet
- Enlarged seed packet image
- Seed catalogue
- Magnifying glasses
- Rulers
- Three different varieties of greens (e.g., spinach, mizuna, watercress)
- White and colored paper
- Pictures of different greens
- Crayons/colored pencils
- And The Good Brown Earth (book) by Kathy Henderson

Directions

Introducing Tender Greens: Farmers' Favorites

Explain that greens are fast-growing vegetables, and for this reason, they are some of farmers' favorite vegetables to grow. Ask students to predict how many days it takes to grow greens from seed to plant. Ask them where they would look to find the correct information. Show students a seed catalogue and seed packet.

For first and second grade classes, give leafy greens seed packets to several students and ask them to read to find out how many days it takes for the greens to grow. For kindergarten, point to the place on the enlarged seed packet where you can find the information. Were the students' predictions correct?

Look, Describe, Write, Draw

Ask students to wash their hands. Give each student one leaf of each of the three different varieties of greens. Ask students to look closely at the three types of greens. Give them magnifying glasses to examine more closely. Ask them to describe how each leaf looks and feels. Give older students rulers. How long is each leaf? Record the data on the observation chart with columns for feels, looks, tastes, and smells.



Leafy Green Exploration

Learn It

Directions

Taste & Line Plot

Ask students to taste each leaf. Ask them to choose which type was their favorite. Record the data in a line plot. Describe what the line plot shows with the students. Which type was the most popular? And the least?

Garden Extension

If you have tender greens growing in your garden bed, take the class out to the garden and tell them you are going to pick a few leaves to observe. Greens are leaves that we eat. Do the students see other leaves that we can eat? Pick a few other types of edible leaves. Do they see leaves we don't eat? Choose a few edible and inedible leaves. Hold them up side by side and ask the class to compare the leaves. How are they similar? How are they different?

Lesson adapted from: Growing Minds, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and Montana Harvest of the Month Classroom Connections [Leafy Greens Classroom Bites](#).



Tender greens growing, credit: WSDA



Spinach-Strawberry Salad

Make It

Be sure to follow local Food Safety rules and regulations. Learn more here: [Food Safety Rules and Regulations](#) | [Washington State Department of Health](#).

Recipe: Spinach Strawberry Salad Yield: 16 sample servings (1/4 cup)	
Ingredients	Directions
<p>Salad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 cups fresh spinach, mizuna, or tender greens mix • 1 cup fresh strawberries, sliced <p>Dressing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 tablespoons vegetable oil • 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar • 2 teaspoons prepared mustard 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rinse greens well, drain, and dry. Tear into bite-sized pieces and place in salad bowl. 2. Gently toss strawberries with greens. 3. Combine all dressing ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well. 4. Add just enough dressing to lightly coat salad leaves right before serving.

Recipe adapted from [WSU Extension Yakima County SNAP-Ed](#).

Explore interactive taste test resources to encourage participants to try what you made!
[Taste-Testing Event Resources](#)



Eat It

Tender greens, like other leafy green vegetables, are packed with nutrients. Each type has its own unique nutritional makeup, but generally tender greens are great sources of vitamin A, which is important for eyesight, skin, and cell growth and vitamin K, which supports healthy blood clotting, helping bodies heal quickly. They are also good sources of vitamin B9 (folate), magnesium, iron, and calcium. Together, these nutrients support growth and healing throughout the body.

Read It

- Sylvia's Spinach, by Katherine Pryor
- Oliver's Vegetables, by Vivian French
- Watercress, by Andrea Wang

More About It

Find additional learning resources about peas and beans for different age groups below.

- Lessons for elementary students from Get Healty Clark County: [ffvp-salad-greens-worksheet.pdf](#)
- Lesson for grade K-2 by Washington Agriculture in the Classroom: [A Taste of Leafy Greens](#)
- Preschool lesson plan from South Dakota State University Extension: [Spinach - Preschool Lesson Plan](#)



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