

Leafy Greens: Lettuce, Spinach, Swiss Chard, Arugula, and French Sorrel

Nutritional Components of Leafy Greens

Carbohydrates
Water
Minerals calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, and iron
Vitamins A, E, C, K, B2 (riboflavin), B6 (pyridoxine), and B9 (folate)

Lettuce: This fast growing annual in the sunflower family **Asteraceae** was one of the 1st plants brought to the New World by Christopher Columbus. It varies in color from light green to reddish brown and falls into 2 main categories, leaf lettuce and head lettuce.

As a cool weather vegetable lettuce may be planted in January, and October. Since the seeds are extremely small, one of the simplest methods of planting is to sow them in rows, cover them with ¼ inch to ½ inch of good compost and then water them carefully. The seedlings will need to be thinned for good growth. Planting seeds every 7 to 10 days will guarantee a continuous supply of lettuce. By cutting the outer leaves and leaving the young inner ones to further develop,

you may extend your harvest period for a long time. When temperatures rise, the leaves become bitter. The lettuce will then **bolt**, (forms a seed stalk that grows rapidly). Bolted lettuce should be added to the compost pile.

Spinach: Native to southwest Asia, this cool weather vegetable has a high nutritional value and is a rich source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Spinach is a member of the **Amaranthaceae** family.

The 3 types of spinach – crinkle leaf, smooth leaf and semi-crinkled (a hybrid) - are best planted here in mid October and may also be planted in early spring. Plant the seeds ½ inch deep and 2 inches apart. Like lettuce seedlings, spinach seedlings will need to be thinned for best results. Continual sowing and appropriate cutting will prolong the harvest season. If Popeye had known how much better spinach tastes fresh than from a can, he would have started planting!

Swiss Chard: This is native to the Mediterranean region and in the **Amaranthaceae** family. Swiss chard is also very nutritional. Many people hate to cut this plant because of its shiny green, ribbed leaves and white, yellow, or red stems. In fact, Swiss chard is grown in many flower gardens because of its pretty leaves. We usually buy young plants and transplant them in early spring. The young leaves may be used in salads while the more mature leaves and stems are best cooked. Swiss chard is very perishable and must be used soon after harvesting. Swiss chard, spinach and beets are in the same family.



Arugula: Arugula is a cool-season leafy green that is sometimes sold as an herb. However, its peppery taste is wonderful raw in salads. Italian cooks also use it in many dishes. It belongs to the cabbage or mustard family **Brassicaceae**, or **Brassica** for short.

French Sorrel: French sorrel, often classified as an herb, is an unusual leafy green that is a perennial here. It is native to the mountains of southern and central Europe and southwest Asia and is in the **Polygonaceae** family. We usually plant purchased seedlings. French sorrel has green shield-shaped leaves and a sour, lemon-like taste. The sour taste comes from the high vitamin C content of the plant. French sorrel is also high in vitamin A and iron. It may be added to soups and spinach and chard dishes. It is great eaten raw in salads with other greens. One of our favorite ways to eat it is instead of lettuce in sandwiches.

Questions: What do we mean by cool season plant? _____

What leafy green is usually NOT eaten cooked? _____

Which leafy green is a member of the Brassica plant family? _____

Instead of drinking orange juice, which leafy green could be eaten? _____