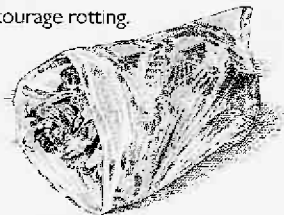


A Guide to Cooking Greens

We've blanched, steamed, stir-fried, and sautéed enough greens over the years to know that some taste best cooked quickly over a high flame, while others benefit from slow, gentle heat. To pair the right leaf with the right cooking method, follow our thoroughly tested guidelines. **BY KEITH DRESSER**

STORING

If you're buying greens in advance, we recommend storing them in an open plastic produce bag or zipper-lock bag. In tests, we've found that trapped gases and too much constriction encourage rotting.



CLEANING

To ensure that every bit of dirt and grime gets washed off our greens, we trade the smaller confines of a salad spinner for a clean sink full of water, where there is ample room to swish the leaves. Unless you're stir-frying the greens, don't bother patting or spinning them dry; a little water clinging to their leaves helps them cook.



Gently swish greens under water to loosen grit. Give dirt several minutes to settle to bottom before gently lifting greens into colander to drain. Repeat if necessary to remove all dirt.

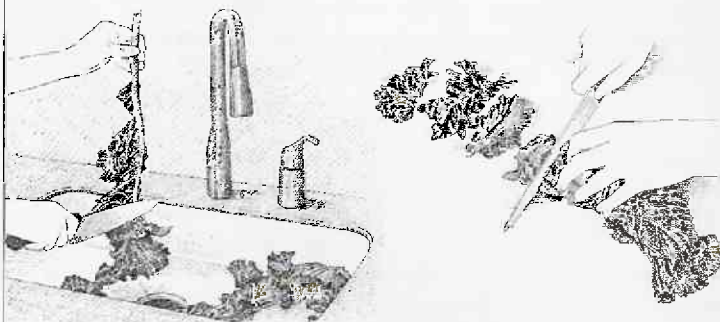
Pack It Down (Lightly)

Recipes often call for cups of "loosely packed" greens. Here's how to make sure you don't overdo it: Drop greens by the handful into a measuring cup and then gently pat down, using your fingertips rather than the palm of your hand.



PREPPING

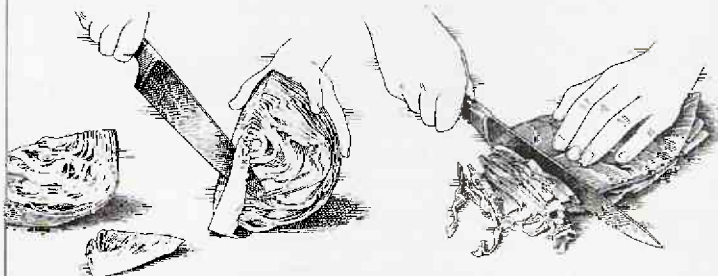
KALE AND COLLARD GREENS



1. Hold each leaf at base of stem and use knife to slash leafy portion from either side of tough stem.

2. Stack several washed leaves, roll into cigar shape, and coarsely chop.

GREEN, RED, AND SAVOY CABBAGE



1. Cut cabbage into quarters and cut away hard piece of core from each quarter.

2. Separate quarters into manageable stacks; press each stack to flatten. Cut stacks crosswise into thin strips.

MATURE SPINACH



Curly spinach has thick stems that should be removed before cooking. Grasp each leaf at base of stem and pull stem from leaf.

SWISS CHARD AND BEET, MUSTARD, AND TURNIP GREENS



Fold leaves in half. Cut along edge of rib to remove thickest part of rib and stem.

BOK CHOY AND NAPA CABBAGE



1. Trim bottom inch from head. Wash and pat dry leaves and stalks. Cut away leafy green portion from either side of white stalk.

2. Cut each stalk in half lengthwise, then crosswise into strips.

3. Layer leaves in manageable stacks; cut stacks crosswise into thin strips.

Which Method Works for Which Green?

GREEN	TEXTURE	COOKING METHOD
Beet Greens	Medium-Tender	S
Bok Choy	Crisp, High Moisture	SF
Collards	Sturdy	SB, PS
Green Cabbage	Crisp, High Moisture	QB
Kale	Sturdy	SB, PS
Mustard Greens	Sturdy	SB, PS
Napa Cabbage	Crisp, High Moisture	SF
Red Cabbage	Crisp, High Moisture	QB
Savoy Cabbage	Crisp, High Moisture	QB, SF
Spinach (mature)	Medium-Tender	S
Swiss Chard	Medium-Tender	S
Turnip Greens	Sturdy	SB, PS

Key: PS=Pan-Steam; QB=Quick Braise; S=Sauté; SB=Slow Braise; SF=Stir-Fry

FIVE WAYS TO COOK GREENS

QUICK-BRAISE

Best For: Green, Red, and Savoy Cabbage

Why Use It: Cooking cabbage in a small amount of flavorful liquid preserves its bite. This method also creates a flavor exchange with the cooking liquid and builds complexity. Adding butter to the liquid deepens cabbage flavor and improves texture.

Basic Method: Melt 2 tablespoons butter in Dutch oven; add 1 pound thinly sliced cabbage and ½ cup braising liquid. Simmer, covered, until cabbage is wilted, about 9 minutes.



➤ NINE IS A MAGIC NUMBER

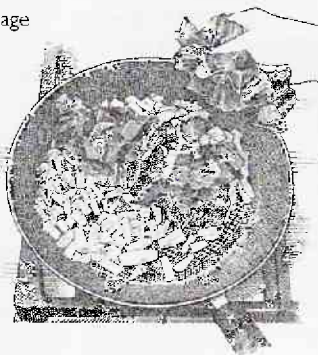
Cabbage notoriously gives off an unpleasant odor when it cooks due to the breakdown of the leaves' cell walls, which releases sulfur-bearing flavor compounds. The key to minimizing that smell is all in the timing: We've found that about nine minutes of braising is just long enough to tenderize the sturdy leaves but brief enough to avoid producing an overabundance of sulfurous odor.

STIR-FRY

Best For: Bok Choy and Napa and Savoy Cabbage

Why Use It: Stir-frying over high heat lightly browns the greens, enhancing flavor while preserving some crunch.

Basic Method: Heat oil in nonstick skillet (preferred to wok when cooking on flat-top burner) over high heat. If using bok choy or napa cabbage, add sliced stalks and cook briefly. Add aromatics and cook briefly, then add 1½ pounds thinly sliced leaves and cook until tender, about 1 minute.



➤ GIVE STALKS A HEAD START

Unlike many other greens, bok choy and napa cabbage contain both edible stalks and edible leaves. We add the stiffer stalks to the pan first, cooking them until crisp-tender and just starting to brown before adding the more delicate leaves.

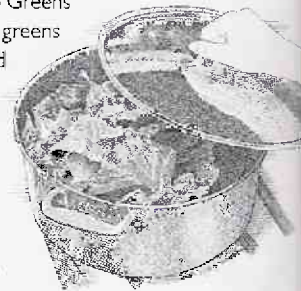
FIVE WAYS TO COOK GREENS, CONTINUED

PAN-STEAM

Best For: Kale, Collards, and Mustard and Turnip Greens

Why Use It: Pan-steaming quickly wilts assertive greens while preserving some of their pungent flavor and hearty texture.

Basic Method: Heat garlic in olive oil in Dutch oven over medium heat. Add 2 pounds damp chopped greens (lots of water should still cling to leaves), cover pan, and cook until wilted, about 7 to 9 minutes for kale and turnip and mustard greens and 9 to 12 minutes for collards.



SLOW-BRAISE

Best For: Kale, Collards, and Mustard and Turnip Greens

Why Use It: This one-pot method slow-cooks assertive greens in a small amount of liquid.

The long cooking mellows the bitterness of the greens more than pan-steaming and yields a more tender texture. To ensure that the greens don't taste watery, we increase the heat at the end of cooking to evaporate excess liquid.

Basic Method: Cook onions in oil in Dutch oven until softened. Add 2 pounds damp chopped greens and cook until beginning to wilt. Add 2 cups braising liquid, cover, and cook over medium-low heat until tender, 25 to 35 minutes for kale and turnip and mustard greens and 35 to 45 minutes for collards. Uncover, increase heat to medium-high, and cook until pot is almost dry.



SAUTÉ

Best For: Mature Spinach, Swiss Chard, and Beet Greens

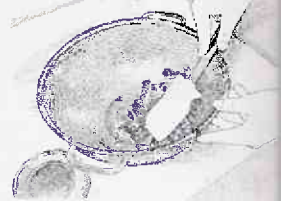
Why Use It: The relatively high heat cooks down medium-tender, high moisture greens before they have a chance to get soggy.

Basic Method: Heat garlic in oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add 2 pounds damp greens and cook, tossing with tongs, until wilted, about 2 minutes for spinach and 5 minutes for Swiss chard and beet greens.



➤ QUICK SQUEEZE

While sautéing evaporates most of the greens' moisture, we like to transfer hot greens to a colander in the sink and gently press them against the side to remove any excess water before serving.



Parcook Baby Spinach, Then Sauté

Sautéing baby spinach usually results in a watery mess. Our solution: Wilt this very delicate green in the microwave on high power for three to four minutes with 1 tablespoon of water per 6-ounce bag. Parcooking softens the leaves so moisture can be removed. Press the wilted leaves against the sides of a colander to squeeze out moisture; chop and press again. Then proceed with sautéing.

