



Green Day

Spring and the glory of local leafy greens.

Eating seasonal produce in Oregon is either feast or famine, and early spring is a time of year when the pickings are slim. Local apples, pears, squash and root crops, those tried and true standards, are available in health food stores, but for real freshness, now is the season for greens.

I first ventured into greens in my 20s, after an anti-vegetable childhood. Swiss chard was my first love and is still one of my favorites: It has mild and tender leaves and the Bright Lights variety has lovely rainbow colored stems. It's great raw in a salad or in a cheesy savory tart. I've tried recipes, from France and Italy, where Swiss chard is cooked into a sweet tart. The chard should be chopped and either steamed over water, blanched until tender, or sautéed in a little olive oil or butter before being placed in a tart shell, sprinkled with orange zest or golden raisins, topped with a sweetened custard and baked. The stems can be steamed and eaten with butter and garlic like asparagus, or diced and sautéed as you would onions. The season for chard only lasts a few more weeks, so don't miss out.

Kale was my next step. Eating it for its nutritional value was enough at first: It is the Super Green. It's chock full of vitamins and minerals in high concentrations: calcium, potassium, beta-carotene, and other antioxidants, and it's very high in fiber if you don't cook the heck out of it. The flavor can be bitter raw, though once I start nibbling on it with some balsamic vinaigrette it's hard to stop. Steaming or stir frying takes the edge off. Tender young kale grown in your own garden is so sweet and juicy even the pickiest of kids (my Cap'n Crunch nephew for example) can graze freely. Kale is easy to grow: It takes little space, has deep roots and a strong backbone, and keeps producing into the chill autumn.

Collards are my latest sweetheart. The recipes I first found made me doubtful, especially those with more ham hock and salt than greens. However, if you're looking for a low-fat, vegetarian version, or just some variety, a mess of greens also goes well with caramelized onions and tamari and sesame seeds. Collards are more similar to cabbage in taste and texture and also make a hearty slaw. They can be eaten raw in salads if you dice them up (cut out the stem and roll the leaves into a tube to save time.) Collard greens' nutrients are not as concentrated as kale and neither

is its flavor. It's not nearly as bitter. Its shape makes for great wraps — I've even had a very chewy sushi wrapped in collard leaves. Add a few diced leaves to your soup, salad — anything — and welcome the bitter fresh taste of springtime to your table.

Bright Lights Swiss Chard Relish

- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 1/2 lbs. Bright Lights chard, leaves saved for a salad, stems cut into 1/4" cubes (2 c.)
- 1/2 c. finely chopped sweet onion, such as Vidalia
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2 c. golden raisins
- 3 Tbs. cider vinegar
- 1 Tbs. honey
- 1/4 c. chopped fresh mint, or 1 Tbs. dried

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet. Add the garlic and cook over moderate heat until softened. Add the chard stems and onion, season with salt and pepper and cook until the onion softens, about 4 minutes. Stir in the raisins, vinegar, honey and half of the mint. Cover and cook until the chard is crisp-tender, about 1 minute longer. Transfer to a bowl and let cool, then mix in the remaining mint.

Lasagna with Greens

This is a simple, flexible recipe made without pasta.

- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3-4 cloves minced or pressed garlic
- 1 tsp. both basil and oregano
- salt and pepper to taste
- 15 oz. ricotta or cottage cheese
- 1/2 lb. mozzarella, grated
- 1 quart tomato sauce
- 1 bunch well rinsed greens (Collards, chard or kale all work well.)
- 1/4 c. pecorino romano or parmesan cheese, grated (optional)

Sauté the onions in the oil until tender, quickly stir in the garlic and herbs. Remove from heat. In a large bowl, mix the cheeses, then add in the onion mixture.

Coat bottom of a 9 x 13 pan with tomato sauce. Place several large greens leaves in the bottom of the pan, then alternate layers of filling, sauce and greens, ending with a thin layer of filling topped with optional grated pecorino romano cheese. Bake covered for about an hour at 350 degrees. **ew**

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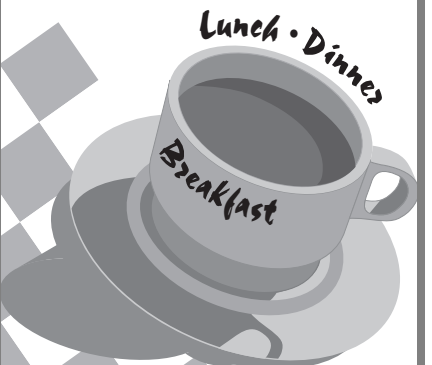
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