



Freezing Leafy Greens



Greens are especially popular among those who grew up in the rural South. They are one of the few fresh vegetables that grows well in the late fall, winter and early spring. Greens make significant contributions of nutrients to the diet, and, with hot cornbread, they are a real taste treat!

Many plants are used as greens. The most popular are mustard greens, turnip greens, collard greens, spinach, kale and Swiss chard. Dandelion and beet greens are popular in some parts of the country. Other wild plants, such as pokeberry, also are eaten to some extent. Greens freeze well for year-round enjoyment.

Nutritive Value

Greens make important contributions of minerals, vitamins and phytochemicals to the diet, and they are low in calories. They are a rich source of carotene, which becomes vitamin A inside the body, and ascorbic acid or vitamin C. They are rich in the minerals iron and calcium, and in dietary fiber. Spinach, however, contains a large amount of oxalic acid, which ties up much of the calcium, making it unavailable for use in the body.

Selection

Select greens that are young and tender, free of blemishes and with a fresh, green color. Beet tops and chard will be reddish. Avoid leaves

with coarse, fibrous stems, yellowish-green color, softness or those that are wilted. Discard leaves badly damaged by insects.

Preparation

Look over leaves carefully while washing. It is sometimes difficult to see insects, especially aphids. Cut or tear out tough stems and midribs; discard. Wash several times in cold water, lifting leaves from the water, allowing grit and soil to settle to the bottom. Leave small leaves whole; tear or cut large ones as desired.

Blanching

Greens must be blanched, or heated, before freezing. This is a very important step because if greens are not blanched properly, they will lose their fresh flavor quickly in frozen storage. Heating is necessary to destroy the action of natural enzymes found in vegetables. Enzymes help vegetables grow and mature. If their action is not stopped before freezing, however, they continue to be active and cause vegetables to develop off-flavors, undesirable odors, discoloration and toughness. Another important reason to blanch is that it wilts the greens, making them easier to pack.

To blanch:

- Work with a small quantity of greens.
- Put only 1/2 pound of greens (about 4 cups, packed) in each gallon of boiling water.





Place greens in wire basket or loose in a big kettle of boiling water.

When water returns to a boil, start counting blanching time. Stir greens while blanching; if they are in a basket, move basket up and down to agitate greens so they will heat thoroughly.

Do not overcook. Use same blanching water for several batches.

Blanching time:

Collard greens - 3 minutes

Other greens - 2 minutes

Very tender spinach leaves - 1 1/2 minutes

Do not steam greens. The leaves mat together and do not heat properly.

After blanching, cool greens in ice water, drain and package in moisture-vapor-proof bags or containers. Barely cover with ice water, leave 1/2 inch head space, remove air and seal. This gives an excellent product, which will maintain high quality for a much longer time in frozen storage.

Another way is to package without cooling in half-pint containers, leaving 1/2 inch head space. Seal, set in pan of cold water to cool slightly, then freeze at zero degrees.

Freezing cooked greens:

Many homemakers prefer to freeze greens after cooking. Package immediately without cooling in small containers (about a pint); set containers in cold water a short time to cool, then freeze immediately.

To freeze turnips and greens:

Prepare turnip greens according to above directions. Scrub and peel tender roots. Dice or cut in 1/2-inch cubes. Blanch 2 minutes, cool and mix with turnip greens for packaging, or mix with greens to blanch. Barely cover with ice water. Leave 1/2 inch head space, remove air and seal.

Three pounds of greens will yield about 2 pints of frozen greens.



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