

Eat More Kale!

Kale provides more nutritional value for fewer calories than almost any other food around. As part of the Brassica family, a group of vegetables including cabbage and brussels sprouts, kale has gained widespread attention due to its health promoting sulfur-containing phytonutrients (cancer-fighters!). Kale is cholesterol-free, and an excellent source of vitamin A (192.4% RDV/cup), vitamin C (88.8% RDV/cup), vitamin K (1327.6% RDV/cup), and manganese (27% RDV/cup). It is also a very good source of dietary fiber, copper, calcium, vitamin B6, iron, and potassium (whfoods.com).

Even though it is a nutritional superstar, kale is not beloved by many people – I think it is misunderstood. Kale is much tougher than other leafy greens, but simply requires a little more attention and innovation.

Before eating or cooking, wash the kale leaves thoroughly under cool running water. Both the leaves and the stem of kale can be eaten. After removing any roots that remain, you can just cut it into the desired shape and size. If your recipe calls for the leaves only, they can be easily removed – just take each leaf in hand, fold it in half lengthwise, hold the folded leaves near the base where they meet the stalk, and with the other hand, gently pull on the stem. You can also use a knife to separate the leaves from the stems. (I save some of the stems for my dog – he loves the crunch!)

Here are some ideas for easy, quick-fix side dishes:

- Sauté kale in olive oil with fresh garlic. Sprinkle with lemon juice and kosher or sea salt just before serving.
- Crisp up a piece or two of bacon (cut into smaller pieces), then wilt the washed kale leaves in the drippings. Add a pinch of nutmeg at the end.
- Braise chopped kale with some diced apples (pick a firm variety). Before serving, sprinkle with balsamic vinegar and chopped walnuts.
- Combine cooked (boiled or steamed) and chopped kale, pine nuts and feta cheese with whole grain pasta drizzled with olive oil.
- The taste and texture of steamed kale makes it a wonderful topping for homemade pizzas.

For when you have a little more time, a few favorite kale recipes follow:

Roasted Kale with Sea Salt (This is snacky...almost like chips!) – 2 servings

By Stephanie Gallagher (from heart-healthy-cooking.suite101.com)

- 4 cups firmly-packed kale, washed and stemmed
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. good-quality sea salt

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Toss kale with extra virgin olive oil. Roast for five minutes. Turn kale over. Roast another 7 to 10 minutes until kale turns brown and becomes paper thin and brittle. Remove from oven and sprinkle with sea salt. Serve immediately.

Rustic Tomato Pie with Kale Pesto Sauce - 6 servings

By Stephanie Gallagher (from heart-healthy-cooking.suite101.com)

- 2 cups (packed) fresh kale
- 3 cloves garlic or 3 garlic scapes
- 1/3 cup walnuts, toasted
- 1/2 cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2/3 cup part-skim ricotta cheese
- 1 9-inch pie crust, store-bought or homemade
- 2 cups sliced Roma tomatoes (seeded, if you like)
- 2 oz. fresh mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Place kale, garlic and walnuts in a food processor fitted with the metal blade and pulse several times until kale is broken up to a manageable size. Add Pecorino cheese and puree until blended, but still chunky. Drizzle in the olive oil, while the food processor is still on, until the mixture becomes the consistency of a thick pesto sauce. Transfer to a medium bowl and mix with the ricotta cheese.

Unfold the pie crust onto a sheet pan or cookie sheet. Spread kale pesto on the pie crust, leaving a two-inch border all the way around. Top with sliced tomatoes, then fresh mozzarella. Gently fold the sides of the pie crust in, crimping slightly, to form a rustic pie. Bake 15 to 20 minutes until cheese is melted and crust is golden brown. Allow the tomato pie to rest at least 5 minutes before serving.

Shredded Kale with Pecorino and Pancetta – 8 servings

Created by Sarah Kate Gillingham-Ryan for O Magazine (August 2008)

- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt or sea salt , plus more for blanching
- 1 1/2 pounds kale, washed, stemmed, and sliced crosswise into 1/4-inch strips
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup (1 ounce) pancetta , finely diced
- 1/4 tsp. dried red chili pepper flakes
- 3 cloves garlic , finely chopped
- 1/3 cup freshly grated Pecorino-Romano cheese

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Fill a large bowl or stockpot with ice water and set aside.

Add kale to boiling water and cook 10 seconds. Using a slotted spoon, transfer kale to ice water. Once cool (after 10 to 20 seconds), transfer kale to colander to drain.

Heat oil in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add pancetta and cook until golden, 2 minutes. Stir in chili flakes and garlic. Cook, stirring constantly, until garlic is golden, 1 to 2 minutes.

Add kale all at once and toss to combine. Stir in ¼ teaspoon salt. Cook 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until heated through and kale is tender-crisp. Transfer to a serving platter and top with cheese.

Spicy Parmesan Green Beans and Kale – 6-8 Servings

Giada De Laurentiis (Giada's Kitchen: New Italian Favorites, 2008)

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion sliced
- 1/4 pound cremini mushrooms, trimmed and quartered
- 1 1/2 pounds green beans, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
- 1 bunch kale (1/2 pound), rinsed, stemmed, and coarsely chopped
- 2 Tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3 Tbsp. finely grated Parmesan cheese

Warm the oil in a large, heavy sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook, stirring, until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add mushrooms, green beans, salt, and pepper, and cook for 2 minutes.

Add wine and continue cooking until the green beans are almost tender, stirring once or twice, about 5 minutes. Add red pepper flakes and kale and continue cooking until kale has wilted, 4 to 5 minutes. Add lemon juice and Parmesan cheese. Toss to coat and serve immediately.

