

INVITING IDEAS

Leaf through these greens



RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON

Nothing offends me more than ordering a salad at a restaurant and being served a plate full of iceberg lettuce - void of nutrients, and as interesting and tasty as a genuine iceberg. When I was growing up, and under the supervision of concerned parents, they would say; "eat your

greens" - they intuitively knew that if it was dark green, it was healthy. My parents didn't have a clue to what arugula was - my mother would have assumed it was an Island that had a resort! Today's public is food educated, iceberg is out - healthy, leafy, organic greens, we can't pronounce, are in!

Along with trendy greens like perilla, mache, purslane, mizuna, and frisée (to name a few) - deep green leafy vegetables considered part of the cruciferous family are often found in our salads and cooked, or served, with our entrees. Cruciferous vegetables, commonly known as the cabbage family, are known to stimulate specific enzymes and block carcinogens. In addition to

their healthy properties, cabbage, broccoli, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kohlrabi, turnips, rutabaga, collards, kale, mustards, and turnip greens, are truly delicious! Have a luncheon or dinner loaded with different summer salads - add sliced tenderloin, grilled fish, or poached chicken to some, add fruit (fresh or dried) and nuts to others. If you want a burst of color, add some lollo rossa (an Italian looseleaf lettuce), or some red radicchio (a red chicory). For something real crunchy add some homemade croutons dusted with grated cheese, jicama or sweet fennel. If you want to add cooked greens to your menu, boil, saute, or grill them!

Here's a quick guide to some of the fashionable greens on the market:

■ Arugula (rocket, roquette & rucola) - considered an herbal green, this ancient Mediterranean native is a member of the mustard family. The characteristic nutty-poppery taste becomes quite muted when cooked. Delicious in fresh salads when young and tender, rocket becomes stronger and almost mustardy when picked as a more mature leaf. The white-purple veined flowers of arugula are edible and make a lovely garnish to a big

beautiful fresh green salad.

■ Cilantro (Chinese Parsley) - are the leaves of the coriander plant. A pungent herb resembling parsley, it is commonly used in Mexican and Asian cuisine. Terrific in fresh green salads, salsas, soups, and stews.

■ Collards - this sturdy leafy green like many other pot herbs can be eaten raw when young and tender. If purchased in a store, they are usually beyond use in the raw stage and need to be cooked. This deep-green kale look-alike (without the crinkle) is a member of the cabbage family and is delicious in soups, stews or boiled and seasoned. It's not just for Southerners!

■ Dandelion - considered an herbal green - when young, this deep green, thin-sculptured leaf is delicate and delicious in salads. Older leaves must be blanched or cooked to reduce their bitterness. Like collard greens, they are great in soups, stews or boiled and seasoned. Typically considered Southern fare in the United States, they are widely used in France.

■ Frisée - part of the chicory family, these light green leaves frilly in appearance, are the least bitter relative. Delicious tossed among a mixture of field greens, make it a part of your mesclun

salad.

■ Mâche (Corn salad) - a mild, nutty-flavored herbal green that remains delicate no matter when it is picked, making it perfect for salads throughout the entire season. It is easily found in northern Europe, France and England. Keep looking for it in stores, the trends may make it more available!

■ Mesclun - a French term for a mixture, in this case, salad greens, it is not a specific lettuce or salad herb, it is a combination of greens - sometimes mild, sometimes piquant. Make your own combinations by combining all types of baby greens and lettuces - add some of the chicories to give it that piquant edge.

■ Mustard - this bright green, slightly fuzzy, pungent green, is another in the cabbage family - a pot herb that finds its way into many a Southern garden! Only very young hand-picked tender leaves can be eaten raw in salads. Mustard greens are generally boiled and seasoned or added to soups and stews eliminating some of their strong bitter flavor.

■ Perilla - this popular Asian pot herb is a member of the mint family

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