Green Up Your Eating Plan
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Summer is a great time to green up one’s eating plan. Eating fresh or cooked greens is a great way to do that.

Greens are available in the early summer in Missouri and then again in the fall. They include the ones most commonly seen in a grocery store, like spinach, kale, collards, mustard greens or Swiss chard. The tops of many root vegetables, such as beets, turnips and rutabagas, can also be eaten as greens. Leaves from some wild plants, such as dandelions and lambs quarters, can also help to add the green needed for the nutrients we need. Be sure to confirm that wild greens are safe for human consumption before serving or eating them.

Green leafy vegetables can be eaten fresh in a salad or cooked. The Seasonal and Simple app, book or mobile web site, found at http://seasonalandsimple.info, has information to store, prepare and serve them, as well as some recipes. Greens should be stored in a perforated bag with a moist paper towel to keep them fresh. They can last for up to a week in the refrigerator. To prepare them for use, wash them thoroughly on both sides to remove any soil that clings to them. Spinning in a salad spinner or allowing to drip dry removes excess moisture that may be undesirable in a salad or cooked dish.

There has been some debate whether greens are more nutritious fresh or cooked. In the May, 2014, issue of Tufts Health and Nutrition Letter, Diane L. McKay, assistant professor at Tufts’ Friedman School, indicates that both methods of preparing greens can be a healthy choice. She reports that cooking breaks down the cell walls and, “Releases some of the phytochemicals like the carotenoids and ferulic acid that are present in the plant, making more of them available to your body when consumed.” These compounds are important for good health, making cooked greens a good option. On the other hand, the amount of water-soluble vitamins, like Vitamin C and the B Vitamins present, decreases with cooking, so fresh has its advantages. Either way, dark green leafy vegetables are an excellent source of Vitamin K, so important in the clotting of blood needed to heal wounds.

Find a creative, nutritious and inexpensive way to eat greens while they are in season this year.

For more information on eating more greens or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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