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## **Plants on Your Plate**

### Collard Greens

I decided to take a step away from my comfort zone with this month's installment of Plants on Your Plate and reached out to some of my southern-rooted friends for some insights. Growing up on a dairy farm in south-central Kansas, green beans, corn, and carrots were the most common vegetables at our table. The only kind of 'greens' I encountered happened at school lunch in the form of canned spinach, which I usually tried to sneak into my empty milk carton. Grown-up me still isn't a fan of canned spinach, but I do love a good spinach salad. I have also discovered that my family likes kale and swiss chard, so I decided it was time to try something new...and chose collard greens!

In the south, the term 'greens' refers to vegetables whose leaves are eaten when cooked until tender and can include mustard, turnip, beet, and collards. Collards are a member of the brassica family and a 'cousin' to cabbage and is sometimes referred to as tree-cabbage or headless cabbage. Most historians agree that collards originated in Greek and Roman gardens around 2000 years ago, though some will go as far back as 5000 years. British settlers brought seeds to the colonies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Today, South Carolina is the top producer of collard greens in the United States and in 2011, declared them the state vegetable.

Collards, like most leafy greens, are full of powerful nutrients including vitamins A, C, K, and folate, as well as the minerals iron, calcium, magnesium, and of course dietary fiber. These key nutrients show promise in the risk reduction and prevention of heart disease and certain

cancers, as well as beneficial to eye health, digestive health, healing damaged tissues and preventing neural tube defects in developing fetus’.

Collards can be grown year-round, but the best quality crops appear in the cooler temperatures in early spring and late fall. When selecting collard greens, look for deep green leaves that are sturdy and free of any wilt or yellow areas, indicating lack of freshness. Refrigerate in a plastic bag for up to a week for optimal freshness.

Prior to cooking, fresh greens should be soaked and swished several times in cold water to remove sandy grit. Collards can be cooked in a variety of ways, and usually starts with trimming out the tough center vein. Leaves can be blanched and stuffed, like stuffed cabbage rolls, or finely chopped and added raw to salads. For a truly southern flavor, greens are cooked ‘low and slow’ for several hours with a smoky meat like ham or bacon. The recipe below has a shorted cooking time and uses a leaner meat choice, but still produces a delicious flavor. I hope you will step outside of your comfort zone and give it a try!

### **Savory Collard Greens**

*(makes 8 servings)*

4 pounds collard greens  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 red bell pepper, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
3 cups low sodium chicken broth  
1 smoked turkey leg  
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes  
1 tablespoon vinegar  
1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1. Clean collard greens by swishing in sink to remove dirt and grit, drain well. Trim center vein from leaves and chop into 2 x 2-inch pieces, set aside.
2. Heat oil in heavy Dutch oven and add garlic, onion and peppers and sauté until tender.
3. Add chicken broth and bring to boil. Add turkey leg and red pepper flakes, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Add collard greens in bunches, allowing greens to wilt before adding more, until all greens are added. Bring back to boil and simmer covered for 30 minutes.
5. Remove from heat, add vinegar and sugar.

**Nutrition information:** Calories: 123, Total Fat: 9g, Saturated Fat: .6g, Sodium: 150mg, Carbohydrates: 17g, Fiber: 8g, Protein: 9g

Recipe adapted from Seasonal and Simple, analyzed by verywellfit.com

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