

THE MANY DELIGHTFUL FACES OF A SPINACH SALAD

We all know that Popeye the Sailor Man thrived on spinach. When a crisis arose, out came that can of spinach to fortify him and win the day. It's not clear how many kids of his day were convinced to join him.

However unappealing that meal appeared, the virtues of spinach are many. Fresh spinach is full of iron and a bevy of vitamins, many of them antioxidants. Antioxidants are now known to help prevent cancer and the plentiful B vitamins help build muscle strength. Selenium, an important trace mineral and cancer fighter, rounds out the list of laudable nutrients found in spinach.

Nutritional qualities aside, properly prepared spinach is delicious. One of the most delectable meals to be made of this green powerhouse is the spinach salad. If you've never tried one, you're in for a treat.

Begin by washing your spinach thoroughly. Use a sink full of icy cold water. This keeps the leaves crisp. Swish the leaves, by handfuls, around in the water to remove any sand clinging to the leaves. Repeat this process several times with fresh water, gently rubbing the leaves as you go, until the water is absolutely clear. If you wish, you can pinch off the stems of the leaves. Pat the leaves gently between paper towels or a clean dish towel to remove excess water. Don't bruise the leaves. You want nice crisp leaves for your spinach salad creation.

Fresh spinach has a nice bite to it, somewhat like an al dente version of vegetables. The taste is very slightly, but quite pleasantly, bitter. The flavor is fulsome and might be described as a refreshing palate teaser. Spinach always plays the starring role in any spinach salad. There are many accent ingredients which go well with spinach, but these ingredients are the supporting cast in this vegetable production.

Now it's time to dress your salad. Choose from this lineup as your tastebuds fancy. Although there are traditional combinations, feel free to experiment. Perhaps most important to the successful spinach salad is that all of the ingredients be of the best quality.

Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano shavings, dusted across the top of any spinach salad, are absolutely delightful. A few marinated artichoke hearts serve as counterpoint to the crunchy spinach leaves. The olive oil adds flavor, while the artichoke hearts add zest and texture. Diced, cooked bacon or pancetta sprinkled lightly across the salad is also delicious. Peeled, seeded and diced cucumber provides a good taste contrast. Diced onion and minced garlic are good

with all of these other candidates.

Now you have a generic basic spinach salad recipe. The salad can be of whatever size your appetite requires. By the way, a spinach salad is an excellent choice for those with New Year's weight loss resolutions! To your health!