KALE

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
Kale is a leafy green vegetable that offers essential nutrients for minimal calories. Kale comes from the brassica family, which includes cabbage, Brussels sprouts and collards. A descendant from wild cabbages of southern Europe, kale grows best in colder regions, but can be grown in warm climates. Its peak season is from the beginning of winter to early spring.

Kale, a deep green ruffled leaf, has a sweet but earthy flavor with peppery qualities. Kale has a distinct flavor that is somewhat sweeter than other leafy greens. There are several kale varieties, from curly kale to dinosaur kale to red kale. Each differs slightly in look and flavor. Kale is most commonly served steamed to fully enhance its flavor and nutrient value. However, it can also be braised, sauteed or stir-fried, simmered in soups and stews, or used as greens in salad. Kale has recently become popular by being baked into chips and lightly seasoned with sea salt.

Healthy ingredient contribution

**BETA CAROTENE:** Kale contains beta carotene, which functions much like vitamin A in the body. In addition to being an antioxidant, beta carotene helps prevent eye problems and skin disorders and enhances immunity.

**VITAMIN K:** Present in kale, vitamin K is necessary for blood coagulation and is also active in the metabolic pathways of bone and other tissues.

**VITAMIN C:** Vitamin C, found in kale, is an essential nutrient for humans. It is a cofactor in many enzymes, helps synthesize collagen and is a structural component among blood vessels, tendons, ligaments and bones.

**LUTEIN:** Lutein has significant benefits for the eyes. It protects them from harmful free radicals and increases macular pigment.

**ZEAXANTHIN:** Like lutein, zeaxanthin also benefits the eyes and vision. It helps prevent age-related macular degeneration and cataracts.

**CALCIUM:** A moderate amount of calcium is found in kale. Calcium acts as a signal for many cellular processes and is an essential mineral for bones.

Varieties and uses

- **Curly Kale:** Exceptionally nutritious, the leaves of curly kale have a rich, meaty flavor and robust texture. Curly kale can be boiled or steamed until tender-crisp.
- **Dinosaur Kale:** Also known as Tuscan black cabbage, this member of the kale family is widely used in Tuscan cooking. The deeply puckered leaves are tender and mildly flavored and taste best when lightly steamed or sauteed.
- **Red Kale:** The red variety has a softer texture than curly kale and a slightly sweeter, buttery flavor.
Storage
Kale should be stored in a plastic bag in the coldest section of your refrigerator for no longer than a week. After that, the flavor becomes strong and the leaves turn limp.

Serving size
One cup of steamed kale offers 36 calories, 2 grams of protein, 3 grams of dietary fiber, 89% of your daily value of vitamin C and 354% of your daily value of vitamin A.

Contributions to this article were made by Karen Cuneo.

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RECIPE

KALE AND BUTTERNUT SQUASH PIZZA

Yield: 8 servings

Ingredients:
- ½ small butternut squash, peeled, seeded and thinly sliced (about ¼-inch thick)
- ½ sweet onion, sliced
- 1½ T. olive oil, divided
- 1 t. freshly chopped rosemary
- ½ t. salt
- ¼ t. ground black pepper
- 1 (11-oz.) package refrigerated thin pizza crust dough
- 1½ cups chopped kale
- 1 T. balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Method:
Preheat oven to 400°F. Place squash and onion on large baking sheet; sprinkle with ½ T. olive oil, rosemary, salt and pepper; toss to coat. Bake for about 20 minutes or until squash is tender and onions are light brown. Remove from oven; let cool. Increase oven to 425°F. Coat 12-inch pizza pan with cooking spray. Unroll dough on pan. Starting at center, press dough out to edge of pan, forming crust. LIGHTLY brush dough with remaining olive oil. In small bowl, toss kale with balsamic vinegar. Top pizza dough with kale, baked butternut squash and baked onion slices. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until pizza crust is golden and cheese is melted. Remove from oven; let cool for a few minutes before slicing. Slice; serve warm.

Nutrition Information

This recipe was tested by Clemson University’s Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.