

# Spinach

## Nutrition, Selection, and Storage Tips

If you are from the Baby Boomers generation, you probably correlate spinach with Popeye the sailor man. He credited his strength and energy to eating his spinach. It is speculated that this beloved cartoon strip and television program did actually increase the consumption of spinach in the United States. However, our Millennial generation know more about spinach as a healthy addition to their daily diet and enjoy it raw in salads or cooked in a variety of ways.

According to *Fruits and Veggies More Matters*, spinach was first cultivated over 2,000 years ago in Iran. By 1806, it had become a popular vegetable in America and in the 1920's the U.S. pushed spinach commercially. It can be eaten raw in salads and also as a cooked green much like turnip greens or collard greens.

### How to Select

Choose fresh, crisp, green bunches with no evidence of insect damage. Packaged varieties are also a good option, but make sure to check the expiration and best buy dates carefully.

### How to Store

Loosely wrap spinach in damp paper towel. Refrigerate in plastic bag for use within 3-5 days.

### Nutrition Benefits

Fat free; saturated fat free; cholesterol free; low calorie; high in dietary fiber; excellent source of fiber; high in vitamin A; high in vitamin C; high in iron, high in folate; good source of magnesium.

## Spinach Lasagna

- 9 lasagna noodles, preferably made with whole grain
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 6-8 cups fresh spinach (amount need not be exact)
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 (16 oz.) carton fat-free or low-fat ricotta cheese
- 3 cups shredded cheese (Mozzarella is nice –however other cheeses also will work)
- 1 jar (24 oz.) spaghetti sauce, divided

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees F.

2. Prepare the lasagna noodles according to package directions. Don't overcook them as they will cook more during the baking process. To keep them from sticking together while you're getting the other ingredients ready, rinse them under cold water and lay on a cookie sheet, with layers separated by plastic wrap or foil.
3. As you're preparing the noodles, start assembling the other ingredients. Begin by heating olive oil over a medium-low heat in a large skillet. Add spinach to the pan in stages; turn leaves until they wilt. Add more spinach; repeat process until all of the spinach is added. Remove spinach from skillet, place in a bowl, and set aside to cool.
4. Blend eggs and ricotta cheese in a food processor or blender until smooth. Transfer to another bowl and stir in 2 cups of the shredded cheese. Then, mix in the spinach.
5. Assemble the ingredients in a 13 x 9-inch baking dish that has been sprayed with cooking spray.
  - a. Layer 1: 1 cup of the spaghetti sauce, 3 lasagna noodles, and half the ricotta mixture.
  - b. Layer 2: Repeat layer 1.
  - c. Layer 3: Top with remaining 3 noodles, spaghetti sauce and the remaining 1 cup shredded cheese.
6. Bake about 35 to 45 minutes or until top is lightly browned and a food thermometer inserted into the lasagna registers 165 degrees F. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

**Cook's Notes:**

1. One 10-oz bag of fresh spinach equals approximately 5-6 cups of leaves.

If you wish to use frozen spinach, substitute 1 package (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach, that has been thawed and well drained.

2. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention give this method for washing fresh spinach: "Spinach grows in sandy soil, so wash it thoroughly to get rid of the grainy, sandy particles. Make sure to tear off the stem. Separate the leaves, and place them in a large bowl of water. Gently wash leaves, and let the sand drift to the bottom of the bowl. Remove leaves from the water, and repeat the process with fresh water until the leaves are clean. If spinach is to be eaten raw, dry it completely by using a salad spinner or by blotting it with paper towels."

3. Though this recipe is made without salt, an additional way to lower sodium is to use a no-salt-added spaghetti or pasta sauce or make your own.

Sources:

Recipe from: Alice Henneman, MS, RD, Extension Educator, UNL Extension in Lancaster County, Web: [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu)

[http://food.unl.edu/march-food-calendar#pecan\\_day](http://food.unl.edu/march-food-calendar#pecan_day)

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