

LETTUCE

Nutrition and Health

Lettuce provides vitamin A, iron, folic acid and calcium. A whole head of iceberg lettuce has only about 70 calories.

Selection

Select lettuce with fresh green outer leaves. Avoid yellow, brown, wilted or torn leaves.

Storage

Lettuce should always be covered and refrigerated. However, care should be taken to avoid russet spotting. This brown discoloration occurs when lettuce is kept at high temperatures. Keep in the coolest part of the refrigerator. Some fruits (melons, apples and pears) also cause lettuce to spot because they give off ethylene gas as they ripen. So, don't store it near these fruits.

Preparation

Preparation of lettuce is simple. Tear into bite-sized pieces. Cut out core and shred, if desired. Rinse with cold water and serve. Most lettuce is consumed fresh in salads or on sandwiches. It makes a good garnish or a suitable vessel for cottage cheese, tuna or any pasta salad.

If you want to try something a little different, try cooking it. Steam shredded lettuce for 2 to 3 minutes and top with a little butter. It makes very good soup when combined with broth and spices. Or try braising it with onions, meats and other vegetables.

Recipes

Asian Lettuce Wraps

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1 pound ground meat
- 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and finely grated
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

- ¼ cup peanut or hoisin sauce
- ¼ cup chopped peanuts
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- lettuce leaves separated, cleaned and dried

In a skillet over medium-high heat, add the vegetable oil and saute meat until brown. Stir in ginger, scallions, garlic, soy sauce, red pepper flakes and sauce and cook for 1 minute. Remove from the heat and stir in the peanuts. Season with salt and pepper and serve warm wrapped in lettuce cups.

North African Chicken

Heat oven to 475° and combine the following ingredients:

- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon coriander
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 large clove minced garlic
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 small onion sliced
- 1½-pound chicken, cut into ½-inch strips
- 2 large handfuls of sturdy lettuce, such as romaine
- 2 peppers, seeds removed and sliced (bell or hot)

Make marinade by whisking together spices, garlic and olive oil. Divide marinade between two bowls. Add chicken to one bowl. Combine onion, greens and peppers in the other bowl. Spread each mixture onto hot cookie sheets. Roast 20 to 25 minutes until chicken is done and peppers are tender and greens are crispy.

Overnight Vegetable Salad

- 4 cups torn lettuce
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms, broccoli florets or frozen peas
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 2 hard cooked eggs, diced
- 6 slices bacon, crisp cooked, drained and crumbled

¾ cup shredded Swiss, American or Cheddar cheese
2 green onions, sliced
¾ cup mayonnaise or salad dressing
1½ teaspoons lemon juice

Place lettuce in bottom of bowl about 8 inches in diameter. Layer mushrooms, broccoli or peas on top. Then layer carrots. Arrange eggs and bacon over top of vegetables. Top with ½ cup cheese and the green onions. For dressing, combine mayonnaise and lemon juice. Spread dressing over top of salad, sealing to edge of bowl. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Cover and chill from 2 to 24 hours. 4 servings

Red Wine Vinaigrette

⅓ cup olive oil
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon honey
kosher salt and black pepper

In a small bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar, mustard, honey, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper.

Caesar Salad

3 ounces whole wheat Italian bread, cut into ½-inch cubes
¼ cup plain fat-free yogurt
1 tablespoon reduced-fat mayonnaise
3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon water
1½ teaspoons anchovy paste (if desired)
½ teaspoon pepper
8 cups torn romaine lettuce
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

In a toaster oven or under a broiler, toast the bread cubes for about 1 minute, or until crisp.

In a large bowl, combine the yogurt, mayonnaise, lemon juice, water, anchovy paste, and pepper, whisking until smooth and blended.

Add the bread cubes, lettuce and Parmesan, and toss to coat. 4 servings

Orange Balsamic Salad Dressing

⅓ cup orange juice
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon honey mustard
2 teaspoons olive oil
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 shallot, minced

In a screw-top jar, combine the orange juice, vinegar, mustard, olive oil, salt and pepper. Close and shake to combine. Stir in the shallot. Store the dressing in the refrigerator. Makes ½ cup

Creamy Salad Dressing

2 tablespoons vinegar
1 tablespoon sugar
whipping cream
2 tablespoons mayonnaise

Combine the vinegar and sugar in a measuring cup. Add whipping cream to make ½ cup. Stir in 2 tablespoons mayonnaise; season with salt and pepper to taste.

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Leif Albertson, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development. Originally prepared by Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, former Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development



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