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CHARD

by Julie Cascio

Nutrition and Health

Chard contains a large amount of vitamin A. It is high in calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and sodium. One cup chopped chard has 35 calories.

Selection

Chard is known by several names: Swiss chard, leaf beet, seakettle beet and spinach beet are a few. It is a large-leaf vegetable with wide, flat stems similar to celery. The stems may be yellow, red or white in color. In the store, select chard with wide stalks and fresh, firm, green leaves. Avoid soggy, yellow, brown, wilted or torn leaves.

When harvesting from the garden, cut off the outer leaves 1½ inches above the ground, when they are young and tender (about 8–12 inches long).

Storage

Store chard in the refrigerator, away from apples, pears, plums or tropical fruits. Store unwashed leaves in perforated plastic bags in the coolest part of the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days. The stalks can be stored longer if separated from the leaves.

Home Preservation

Chard leaves freeze well after blanching, but the stems become soggy. Canned chard is similar to canned spinach.

To Freeze:

1. Rinse chard in several changes of cold water, lifting leaves out and leaving sand and soil behind. Separate the stems from the leaves.
2. Bring 4 quarts of water to a rolling boil. Drop about 1 pound of whole leaves in boiling water, cover and blanch for 2 minutes. Blanch stems for 3 minutes.
3. Remove immediately from boiling water and immerse in an ice water bath for 2 minutes. Drain.

4. Pack in zip-closure freezer bags or freezer containers, leaving no airspace. Label, date and freeze at 0°F for up to one year.

Preparation

Young, tender chard leaves can be eaten raw in salads and sandwiches. Chard can be used in place of spinach in any recipe. When cooking older chard, the stems should be separated from the leaves as they require longer cooking.

Chard is a tender green and benefits from a brief cooking period. Spinach, beet greens and kale may be prepared in a similar manner

Recipes

Steamed Swiss Chard

- 2 pounds Swiss chard
- ¼ cup water, plus water for washing chard
- salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon butter (optional)

Wash greens by swishing them in cool water, one handful at a time.

Remove stems and chop into 1-inch pieces. Stack leaves and roll them together.

Cut across roll with a sharp knife. Repeat for additional bundles of leaves.

Heat a skillet over medium heat. Add ¼ cup water and chopped stems to pan. Cook 4 minutes. Add the wet, chopped leaves one handful at a time. Stir after each addition. After all the greens have been added, cover with a tight-fitting lid and cook 2 to 3 minutes. Leaves should be wilted but still bright green in color.

Season with salt, pepper and butter, if desired.

Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Zesty Swiss Chard

- 1 lemon
- 1 orange
- 2 pounds Swiss chard
- salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- lemon juice to taste

Rinse lemon and orange. To make zest, grate the brightly colored outer layer of both citrus; leave the white pith attached to the citrus; set aside. Halve and squeeze the lemon and the orange separately; set juices aside.

Wash the greens by swishing them in cool water, one handful at a time. Remove the stems. Cut stems in half lengthwise and chop stems into half-inch diagonals.

Stack the leaves and roll them together. Cut across the roll with a sharp knife then cut leaves into chunks. Repeat for additional bundles of leaves.

Heat water in a pot with steamer rack to boil. Add chopped stems to steamer. Cover and cook about 7 minutes. Add the chopped leaves. After the greens have been added, cover with a tight-fitting lid and cook 5 minutes. Stir, recover, cook until tender, 5 minutes more. Leaves should be wilted but still bright green in color. Stir in half of the lemon zest and half of the orange zest.

Place chard in serving dish. Stir in oil and lemon juice, salt and pepper. Optional: add orange juice.

Serve warm or at room temperature, remaining zest sprinkled across top. Serves 4.

Sautéed Swiss Chard

- 2 pounds Swiss chard
- 2 tablespoons raw pepitas* (pine nuts or sliced almonds could be used instead)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- coarse salt and ground pepper

Rinse Swiss chard thoroughly. Cut stalks crosswise into 1-inch pieces.

Tear leaves into 2-inch pieces. Set aside from stalks.

In a large saucepan on medium-high heat, toast the pepitas about 2 minutes. Shake the pan to brown evenly. Remove pepitas from pan; set aside.

Pour oil into the same saucepan at medium-high heat. Add stalks; cook about 5 minutes to begin to soften. Add leaves, raisins and garlic. Cover with lid. Reduce heat to low, and cook until tender, about 8 minutes longer. Stir occasionally.

Stir in vinegar and pepitas. Season with salt and pepper. Serves 4.

Bean and Swiss Chard Soup

- 1 pound Swiss chard
- 4 cups drained and rinsed cooked cannellini
- 3 cups vegetable broth
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 bay leaf
- pinch dried red pepper flakes
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- ½ cup uncooked macaroni
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon fresh-ground black pepper

Rinse Swiss chard thoroughly. Cut stalks crosswise into half-inch pieces. Tear leaves into 2-inch pieces. Set aside.

In a large pot, heat the oil over moderately low heat. Add the chard stems, carrot, onion, celery, garlic, and rosemary. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables start to soften, about 5 minutes.

Stir in the broth, beans, bay leaf, red pepper flakes, tomato sauce, macaroni and salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for 10 minutes.

Add the Swiss chard to the pot. Simmer until the chard is tender and the pasta is done, 5 to 10 minutes longer. Remove the bay leaf. Stir in the black pepper. Serves 4.

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