



Kale

A nutrition powerhouse
from Alaskan gardens



By Leslie Shallcross, Health, Home and Family Development Agent

Kale is one of the most nutritious vegetables from the garden. One cup of this leafy green vegetable contains significant amounts of vitamins A, C, K and B6, and significant amounts of the minerals potassium, calcium, iron and manganese. It is also a very good source of dietary fiber. One serving of kale provides more than three quarters of the recommended daily intake for vitamin C. Kale is especially rich in the carotenes lutein and zeaxanthin, which may protect the eyes from both cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. Like other members of the cabbage family, the sulfur containing compounds in kale, are considered protective against cancer.

Kale belongs to the same species of the mustard family as collards, cabbage, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts: *Brassica Oleracea*. Its beautiful large leaves may be serrated or curly; and the color is most often a deep, dark green. The leaves may also be purplish-red or light green flecked with creamy white color. Though it probably originated in the eastern Mediterranean, kale grows well in cool climates like Alaska's and it is found in the cuisines of Britain, Denmark, and Germany.

Many people are familiar with kale's decorative use in gardens and as garnishes but fewer are accustomed to including this in their family's meal plan. Kale has a mild, somewhat spicy flavor similar to that of cabbage. It is remarkably versatile and can be eaten raw but is best lightly

cooked or added to soup or stew. Kale is often paired with potatoes and other winter vegetables.

Purchase kale with a bright color and the absence of wilting or bruising on the leaves. After purchase, use or freeze the kale within a few days. Keep the kale in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator or in a plastic bag to prevent dehydration. Rinse the leaves under running water to remove any dirt or sand before cooking and trim the bottom of the stem. Some prefer to remove the thick midrib before cooking although this is not necessary. To prepare kale for freezing, clean the kale as instructed above and cut to desired size (1 1/2 inch - 2 inch). Blanch kale pieces in boiling water for three minutes. Cool kale immediately then drain, package, and freeze.

Easy Ways to Use Kale

- ☞ Chop several rinsed leaves and add to salad greens for a peppery taste.
- ☞ Chop kale and add to vegetable soup toward the end of cooking.
- ☞ Chop and saute kale. Add to cooked pasta and toss with grated Parmesan cheese. Season to taste with pepper and salt.
- ☞ Microwave wedges of acorn squash and apples. Saute chopped kale with garlic and add pieces of cooked squash and apple to the pan. Sprinkle with balsamic vinegar. Add salt and pepper lightly to taste.

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