

Asian Greens

By Annette Lang, *Expat Kitchen*

Make the most of your time in Asia and experiment with all the delicious, edible leaves found in this part of the world!

Asian greens have been growing in Western countries since the Chinese first settled there in the late 1800's, but it is only in recent years that they have become commercially popular. Their emerald green leaves and stalks increase your vitamin intake and boost energy levels immensely, while their amazing flavors, from subtle-sweetness to a gentle mustard-like peppery edge, make them versatile to cook with.

There is an overwhelming array of literally hundreds of varieties of Asian greens available here in Singapore and you may find ones other than those listed here. However, these do represent the most commonly found varieties. *Choy* is the Chinese word for any leafy vegetable. Thus, Chinese white cabbage might be called bok choy, buk choy, pak choy or baak choi.

Obviously, these vegetables team well with all the usual Asian condiments - soy, ginger, black bean, hoisin oyster, garlic, chilies, etc. But be creative and marry them with some of your favorite western-based sauces to create modern fusion delights.

What to look for

All Asian greens should be clean, fresh and crisp. Flowering varieties are better when in bud, rather than full bloom.

Storing

Like all green leafy vegetables, Asian greens are highly perishable so they need to be handled with extreme care. Buy small quantities regularly. Sprinkle with water to minimize moisture loss. Store at 2 - 4°C with a relative humidity of 90 - 100%. Refrigerate in plastic bags.

Nutritional value

Asian greens are highly nutritious and most are excellent sources of vitamins C and A and also contain many antioxidants. The darker the color, the higher the antioxidant levels. With the exception of Chinese cabbage, Asian greens are a good source of available iron. Unlike spinach, Asian greens do not contain oxalic acid which binds the iron to the spinach so that it is not available to the body. Some, like Chinese broccoli (kai lan) also provide calcium. All Asian greens supply folate and fiber.

When and where to buy

Asian greens are available year-round in Singapore. While all supermarkets stock a variety, Giant, Fair Price and the wet markets have an astonishing selection to choose from.

How to prepare

Stir frying, steaming, blanching and boiling is best. When stems are thick, it is best to cut them from the leaves and cook first, then use a slotted spoon to transfer stems to a large bowl and cover with foil to keep warm. Then cook the leaves. This will ensure even cooking.

Allow 1½ packed cups of greens per person. Serve these healthy and tasty vegetables as a side with grilled chicken, beef or fish. For a main course, add diced, firm tofu. Serve with brown rice for another nutritious option.

Baby Kailan

¼ cup sliced almonds
2 tsp. olive oil
1 tsp. lemon rind, finely grated
1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
500 - 600g kailan

Brown ¼ cup of sliced almonds in a frying pan over medium heat until nicely browned, let cool. Whisk together olive oil, lemon rind and lemon juice. Steam kailan until tender. Drizzle the dressing over kailan and season with pepper. Toss to combine. Top with almonds to serve.



Bok Choy

2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 Tb. oyster sauce
2 Tb. Kecap Manis (sweet Indonesian soy sauce)
1 tsp. sesame oil
2 Tb. toasted sesame seeds
500 - 600g bok choy

Blanch or steam bok choy for 5 minutes, or until bright green and crisp tender. Combine garlic, oyster sauce, Kecap Manis and sesame oil. Place vegetables onto a serving plate, add dressing. Toss well to coat. Sprinkle with sesame seeds.



Chinese Spinach Salad

1/3 cup olive oil
2 Tb. red wine vinegar
2 tsp. Dijon mustard
1 Tb. finely chopped parsley
salt and cracked pepper, to taste
200g snow peas, trimmed and halved
250g green beans, trimmed and halved
1/3 cup torn mint leaves
500 - 600g Chinese spinach
¼ cup pumpkin or sunflower seeds

Make dressing by placing olive oil, red wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, parsley, salt and cracked pepper in a screwtop jar. Blanch snow peas and green beans for 1 to 2 minutes, or until just tender. Plunge into ice cold water. Drain and dry. Place peas, beans, mint leaves and spinach in a bowl. Shake dressing, pour over greens and toss to combine. Sprinkle with pumpkin or sunflower seeds.



Chye Sim

2 tsp. peanut oil
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 chili padi, thinly sliced
500 - 600g chye sim leaves
1 tsp. sesame oil
1 Tb. soy sauce
1 Tb. oyster sauce

Heat peanut oil in a wok over high heat. Add garlic and stir-fry for 1 minute or until fragrant. Add chye sim stems and chili padi. Stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes. Add chye sim leaves. Stir-fry for 1 minute or until just wilted. Add sesame oil, soy sauce and oyster sauce. Stir-fry for 1 minute or until heated through.



Kangkong

2 - 3 chili padis
2 garlic cloves
1 Tb. shrimp paste
2 tsp. sugar
¼ tsp. salt
2 tsp. crushed dried prawns
500 - 600g kangkong
1 Tb. vegetable oil

Pound together in a mortar and pestle chili padi, garlic, shrimp paste, sugar, salt, dried prawns to form a fine paste. Cut the kangkong into 8cm (3 inch) lengths, omitting the tough stalks and roots. In a hot wok heat oil and fry the chili paste for ½ a minute. Add the kangkong. Stir-fry over high heat for 1 minute. Serve immediately.

