



## **Boiled Spinach**

Spinach is a tasty and nutritious vegetable that is good on its own or as a component in other dishes.

However, spinach is also relatively high in oxalates, which can be a particular problem not only for people with kidney stones but also supposedly for some people with chronic mold-related illness.

Although I usually do not boil vegetables, spinach is an exception since boiling has been shown in studies to reduce oxalate levels in that vegetable by well over 50%.

The studies suggest that sautéing spinach results in practically no oxalate loss at all and that steaming results in much less loss than boiling.

Fortunately, if spinach is boiled very briefly and then immediately rinsed in cold water, it will retain its bright green color as well as its texture.

I was delighted to realize recently how easy it is to use boiled spinach to prepare authentic spinach gomaе, a cold dish I ate frequently when traveling in rural Japan.

(A blender, food processor or mortar-and-pestle set does need to be used to grind the sesame seeds used in the dish though.)

Other kinds of easy but flavorful sauces can be used on the cold spinach as well.

Boiled spinach can be reheated with some butter or other ingredients and served as a hot side dish.

It also may be used as part of many different main courses such as quiche, pasta, pizza or sauteed chicken.

### **Step One – Essential Ingredients:**

Fresh spinach may be purchased either in bunches or in bags.

Although I rarely eat frozen vegetables, the quality of frozen organic spinach tends not to be too bad. It therefore may be worthwhile to have a package on hand to use in omelets or other situations where a bit of spinach flavor is desired, especially since fresh spinach does not tend to last long.

### **Step Two – Choosing The Pan:**

A large pot (preferably 4 quarts or more) will be needed to heat the water so that the spinach can be briefly boiled (“blanched”) in it.

I use a 6-quart stainless steel pot (part of an All-Clad steamer set), for instance.

A cast iron pot also will work fine, though the water may take a while to come to a boil in it.

### **Step Three – Preparing The Spinach:**

While cooking spinach is usually fast and easy, cleaning the spinach may take a little bit of work.

Bunches of spinach tend to be dirty and sandy, meaning that they need to be washed thoroughly before they are used.

Start by cutting off the very bottom of each bunch, so that the pieces are separated from one another.

I personally like eating the crunchy spinach stems and so usually leave those attached.

However, the stems also could be cut off and discarded so that only the leaves are included in the dish.

Even if bagged spinach is supposed to be pre-washed, I like to give it a quick rinse anyway.

To wash any kind of fresh spinach, place it inside a large clean container (such as the kitchen sink) and then fill with water.

Stir the spinach around in the water a bit so that any dirt will fall off.

Any wilted leaves should be picked out and discarded.

Remove the spinach from the water and put it in a colander, then drain the water from the sink or other container.

If the spinach was especially dirty, you may want to repeat the washing process one or more times before cooking it.

#### **Step Four – Cooking The Spinach:**

Heat water to boiling in the pot.

Drop in the spinach and stir it around in the water for a minute or two, until it is wilted and barely cooked.

Pour the contents of the pot into a colander over the sink (or fish the spinach out of the pot with a slotted spoon and put it in a colander).

If the spinach is to be served cold or put aside for use as a component of a different dish, rinse it in cold water to stop the cooking so that the bright green color is retained.

Gently press a spoon into the spinach as it sits in the colander to decrease the water content.

### **Step Five – Finishing The Dish:**

The spinach leaves may be left whole or chopped into finer pieces with a knife on a cutting board.

The cooked spinach may be used as a component of another dish, such as quiche, omelets, pasta, pizza, soup or sauteed chicken.

It also may be served hot or cold on its own.

A few preparation options follow.

### **Simple Buttered Spinach**

Freshly cooked spinach is often served simply with butter, salt, black pepper and maybe a sprinkle of nutmeg or cayenne pepper.

Ghee or olive oil could be substituted for the butter.

Melting the butter (or other fat) in a skillet and then stirring in the spinach would warm up the spinach a bit if it has become cold.

For some extra flavor, a clove of pressed or minced garlic could be briefly sauteed in the fat in the skillet before the spinach is added.

Chopped walnuts or other nuts or seeds would add some additional interest value to the dish.

If desired, sprinkle a small amount of fresh lemon juice or vinegar on the spinach just before serving.

A little grated parmesan cheese or other cheese also could be a nice final touch.

### **Savory Sauteed Spinach**

This dish gives extra flavor to the spinach through the addition of bacon, mushrooms, onions and/or garlic.

If using bacon, chop up a few slices and sauté it in a skillet until almost crisp. Remove the pieces of bacon with a slotted spoon.

Then heat a couple of tablespoons of fat total in the pan. This could consist of butter, olive oil, bacon grease, or a combination.

If using mushrooms, slice them thinly and add them to the skillet. Sauté over medium heat until golden brown, then remove them from the pan.

If using onions, slice them thinly and add them to the skillet. Cook them until they are soft and translucent, adding a little more fat to the pan as they cook if they start to stick.

If desired, add a clove or two of pressed or minced garlic to the mushrooms or onions as they cook.

Fold together the spinach and other cooked ingredients in the skillet.

Cook for a minute or two, then adjust salt and pepper to taste.

Add a little vinegar or grated cheese to the dish if desired.

Serve warm.

### **Chinese Stir-Fried Spinach**

Most recipes for Chinese spinach suggest that the fresh spinach leaves be stir-fried in the wok rather than boiled.

However, boiling the spinach first and then stir-frying the whole cooked leaves provides a similar result with a supposedly much lower oxalate content.

Start by mixing a sauce for the spinach using Asian-type flavors, such as the following:

- Soy sauce
- Coconut aminos

- Toasted sesame oil
- Mirin
- Sake
- Sherry
- Chili sauce
- Orange or tangerine juice
- Ginger juice
- Rice vinegar
- Sugar
- Maple syrup

I would be aiming for about 2-3 tablespoons of sauce for every eight ounces of raw spinach originally used.

Heat a couple of tablespoons of refined coconut oil or other oil appropriate for stir-frying to a wok or skillet.

Add a couple of cloves of garlic (pressed or minced) and cook briefly over medium heat.

Add the cooked spinach to the pan and stir it around a bit.

Stir in the sauce mixture, along with some salt and maybe some freshly ground pepper.

If desired, take some small cubes of tofu (cooked or raw) and gently fold them into the spinach mixture.

A handful of nuts or seeds also could be added for some extra flavor and texture.

Taste for seasonings and adjust.

Consider garnishing the dish with whole sesame seeds.

Serve warm.

## **Japanese Cold Spinach**

Cold cooked spinach is complimented well by Japanese flavorings, such as the following:

- Toasted sesame seeds
- Freshly ground toasted sesame seeds
- Toasted sesame oil
- Soy sauce
- Miso paste
- Mirin
- Sake
- Rice vinegar
- Dashi
- Finely chopped green onion
- White sugar

If sesame seeds are untoasted, they can be cooked briefly in a pan on medium heat until they are golden brown.

The traditional Japanese way to grind sesame seeds is with a mortar-and-pestle set, but pulsing the seeds very briefly in a blender or food processor also works fine.

Packaged tahini likely will not give the same flavor of freshly ground sesame seeds but may be a convenient substitute.

Preferably I would choose a Japanese soy sauce (such as Ohsawa or San-J) since the flavor is lighter.

Those who do not tolerate soy sauce could try using coconut aminos instead.

If the alcohol content of the mirin or sake is a concern, it could be heated briefly in a pan to burn that off before being used in the dish.

A recipe from Food 52 for quick dashi (a sea-flavored broth) is linked in the “Resources” section below.

Conceivably maple syrup could be used instead of the white sugar.

Only small amounts of these Japanese seasonings will be needed to flavor several portions of spinach.

For instance, when I am making spinach gomae, I usually use about four tablespoons of ground sesame seeds, two teaspoons of soy sauce (I prefer Ohsawa Nama Shoyu) and a teaspoon of white sugar for every half-pound of raw spinach.

Regardless of which seasonings are used, mix them together to taste in a small bowl.

Then pour them on top of the cold cooked spinach, tossing lightly.

Spoon the spinach into small individual serving bowls.

If available, sprinkle whole sesame seeds on top for garnish.

### **Creamed Spinach**

Creamed spinach is a rather indulgent dish that was especially popular in the 1950's and that is still served in some steakhouses and other restaurants.

It has been discussed fairly frequently by food bloggers in recent years and is admittedly pretty yummy.

A combination of cooked watercress and cooked spinach (rather than only cooked spinach) would add some interesting depth of flavor to the dish.

To prepare the dish, start by sauteing a small amount of finely chopped onions, shallots or garlic in a few tablespoons of butter, ghee or olive oil in a large skillet.

If a thicker sauce is desired, a spoonful of flour could be sprinkled on the melted butter and then stirred in until smooth. (This could be white flour, gluten-free flour blend, or cornstarch. Or this step can be skipped entirely.)

Another way to make sure that the sauce is plenty thick is to add a few ounces of cream cheese, stirring it in the pan until it is melted and combined with the other ingredients.

Then gradually stir in a cup or less of milk, half-and-half, or cream.

Low-fat milk is usually strongly discouraged since it will make the cream sauce watery.

Homemade cashew milk or another homemade nut milk could be used if dairy is being avoided, however.

If any sort of flour has been used as a thickener, then it is especially important to stir in the liquid very gradually and to blend thoroughly after each addition since otherwise there may end up being lumps.

Season the sauce with salt, pepper and nutmeg.

If desired, stir in some grated hard cheese and/or a melty-type white cheese such as mozzarella.

(Some recipes insist that Parmigiano-Reggiano or other expensive hard cheese is critical, and I do think that cheese contributes to the overall flavor of the dish. It can be omitted for a dairy-free version, however.)

Gently fold the spinach into the cream sauce.

Taste and adjust the salt and pepper if necessary.

Serve warm.

## **Resources**

Food.com – Boiled Spinach:

<https://www.food.com/recipe/boiled-spinach-9687#activity-feed>

BBC Good Food – How To Cook Spinach:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-cook-spinach>

Jessica Gavin – How To Cook Spinach:

<https://www.jessicagavin.com/how-to-cook-spinach/>

Healthy Recipes – Steamed Spinach:

<https://healthyrecipesblogs.com/steamed-spinach/>

WikiHow – How to Blanch Spinach:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Blanch-Spinach>

Just One Cookbook – Spinach with Sesame Sauce:

<https://www.justonecookbook.com/spinach-with-sesame-sauce/>

Food 52 – How To Make Dashi:

<https://food52.com/blog/9800-how-to-make-dashi>

Simply Recipes – Spinach with Sesame and Garlic:

[https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/spinach\\_with\\_sesame\\_and\\_garlic/](https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/spinach_with_sesame_and_garlic/)

Once Upon A Chef – Creamed Spinach:

<https://www.onceuponachef.com/recipes/creamed-spinach.html/>

Pioneer Woman – Creamed Spinach:

<https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a9738/creamed-spinach-to-die-for/>

The Novice Chef – Creamed Spinach:

<https://thenovicechefblog.com/best-creamed-spinach/>

The International Journal of Food Properties – Cooking and Oxalate Levels:

[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10942910903326056#:~:text=Spinach%20has%20been%20regarded%20as,boiling%20\(67%25%20loss\).](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10942910903326056#:~:text=Spinach%20has%20been%20regarded%20as,boiling%20(67%25%20loss).)

Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry – Cooking Methods and Oxalate Loss:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15826055/>

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