

Prepping Greens for Later

~ Helen Huber ~

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As I was growing up on Long Island, NY, my mother believed in preparing healthy foods for her ravenous family. We ate freshly steamed broccoli and green beans, along with two types of “leafy” greens. The first showed up at most dinners in a blue ceramic bowl of pale green iceberg lettuce—the only type of lettuce I ever saw until I was in my twenties.

And then there was spinach. Fresh (from the can), military green, bitter, and to be avoided at all costs. Our spinach intake was upgraded after my innovative mother started buying bunches of sand-gritted spinach in our bustling Hicksville grocery. And so, she came to appreciate, rinse, and include spinach as a dark leafy green, one of many greens I eventually added to my own recipe repertoire (no can opener required).

It took some years, but over time, I began to see leafy greens featured in and around really good food I didn’t prepare myself. With time and practice, I learned how to cook greens to maintain both their color and flavor. These days, leafy greens take up substantial real estate in my garden. And perhaps, like me, you’ve planted a decent amount of kale, collards, chard, spinach, or any leafy plant that is now over-abundantly producing.

Before it all starts flowering (and getting bitter), try harvesting, blanching, shocking, and prepping your greens for a future of healthy eating. For a relatively small investment of time, you can set yourself up to enjoy ready-to-go future greens, even in the dead of winter. The secret is blanching, shocking, chopping, and properly freezing your greens.

Here’s how to prep, followed by what to do with those greens.

How to Prep Greens

1. Get the greens: Harvest, purchase, or be gifted greens.
2. Clean the greens: Wash by dunking a bunch of greens into a tub of cool water. This removes dirt, bugs, debris you don't want. Swish about, remove the greens, dump out the water, add more water, redunk, and swish until no dirt remains in the water. Now you have clean greens. Place your clean greens on a kitchen towel near your cutting board.



Soak and swish greens in water to remove dirt, bugs, etc.

3. Prep the greens: If prepping thicker greens like kale, collard, mustard greens, or chard, remove the center stem with the point of a knife. This is easily done by laying the leaf on a cutting board and slicing down on both sides of the stem from top to bottom. Chard stems are delicious sauteed and can also be blanched and shocked along with the leaves. Compost the tough stems of kale and collards. You'll be left with leaves. Perfect. For greens that have softer stems, like spinach, watercress, and orach, you can just pinch off longer/thicker stems that extend beyond the leaf or leave them on if you prefer. Compost any greens that are slimy, discolored, ravaged, etc.
4. Blanch the greens: Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil, add salt (at least a teaspoon) and add the prepped greens. You can also put your prepped greens in a metal colander that fits into the boiling water, lowering and raising the colander to add/remove greens easily. Alternatively, you can remove greens with a skimmer, sieve, or slotted spoon. If you plan to freeze many vegetables, you might want to invest in a skimmer or other kitchen tool used for taking food from hot liquid. Know that a large pot of boiling water means that when you add your greens, the water will either continue boiling or will return to a boil quickly. This keeps your greens from turning gray, which can happen when they simmer, rather than boil. Salt has two benefits; it stabilizes the chlorophyll, keeping everybody green, and it also seasons the greens a bit. If you are on a salt-restricted diet, just leave it out. Throw the prepped greens into the boiling water. Cook thicker greens like kale and collards for 3 minutes and more tender greens like spinach or orach for one minute. Use a timer! While the water is coming to a boil, get a large bowl of ice water ready or have it ready because the time goes quickly.



Ready an ice bath for shocking and put a large pot of water on high heat to boil. Your greens should be cleaned, leafy, and nearby.

5. Shock the greens: Shocking means scooping out the greens and immediately adding them to the ice water bowl. This immediately stops the cooking and brightens the color-a win-win! Swish the greens around in the ice water until they feel cool to the touch, then drain.

6. Squish and chop the greens: Squish out as much water as possible from handfuls of blanched, shocked greens. Children love to do this with clean hands! Place your squished greens back on the cutting board and chop them up! Don't chop them microscopically small. Chunks of greens are good. Alternatively, you can stack and roll cigars of leaves and cut them into narrow rounds. This is called chiffonade and works equally well when prepping fresh leafy herbs like basil or raw greens like kale for salad.



Skim greens using a skimmer, slotted spoon, or drain into a colander. Only drain if you are doing one batch, otherwise, you'll need to put another pot of water up to boil. In the picture, I'm pressing down on newly skimmed greens to remove hot water before going into the ice bath for shocking.



These newly shocked greens are having water squished out pre-chopping.

7. Clump and freeze: I either use a cookie scoop or a measuring cup to gather a ball of blanched, shocked, squished, chopped greens into balls. Depending on the number of people you generally feed and/or your delight in including greens in your meals, you could use a half-cup or one cup measuring cup. This gives you neat balls of greens. Place your neat balls on a parchment paper lined baking sheet and gently place the balls of greens at least an inch and a half apart. Freeze the balls then the next day, put frozen balls o' greens in a freezer safe bag or container. An airtight container should keep the greens fresh for 8-12 months. Mark the date on the container. Remove as many balls as needed as you add greens to your recipes. Feel proud of yourself! Enjoy! See the many delicious ways you too can eat more greens in/with your meals.



Blanched, shocked, chopped, and squished balls of greens wait to be transferred to a cookie sheet for freezing.



I really love these Souper Cube containers. This is the 2-tablespoon size. Once frozen, I pop them out and store them in a freezer bag.