



FACTS ON Edible Wild Greens in Maine

BULLETIN #4060

Enthusiastic gardeners can get an early start harvesting spring greens that come up right in their backyard. These greens are nutritious—high in vitamin A, vitamin C and iron. They're also low in calories, fat and cholesterol. Plus, wild greens are widely available and require no work at all—except harvesting! As with any green, the younger the plant, the more tender it is. For the safest crop, be sure to pick greens well away from major roads or other chemically treated areas, and wash the greens well before you use them.

Dandelion Cheese Squares

- 2 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons whole-wheat flour
- 1 pound dandelions, parboiled, chopped and drained well (squeeze out extra liquid)
- 2 cups low-fat cottage cheese
- 6 ounces cheddar cheese, grated (2 cups)
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 4 tablespoons wheat germ

In a large bowl, beat the eggs and flour until mixture is smooth. Add dandelions, cheeses, pepper and nutmeg. Mix well. Pour into a well-greased, 13- x 9- x 2-inch baking pan. Sprinkle with wheat germ and bake in a preheated, 350-degree F oven for about 45 minutes. Let stand for about 10 minutes, and then cut into 1-1/2-inch squares. *Makes 54 squares.*



Dandelions

Dandelion greens (*Taraxacum officinale*)—a sure sign of spring—are most welcome to add variety, vitamins and minerals to springtime meals. You may see people digging them in early May in spots where snow still lingers in the fields. Most people boil dandelion greens until tender (change the water once to mellow their tangy taste), then garnish with butter or lemon juice.

Nutritional information: dandelions, boiled

Amount: 3 1/2 ounces. Calories: 33. Fat: 0.6 grams. Protein: 2 grams. Vit. A: 12,168 (IU). Vit. C: 18 milligrams. Iron: 1.8 milligrams.

Dandelion/Fruit Salad

- 1/4 cup herb vinegar
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon canola or olive oil
- 2 teaspoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 5 cups loosely packed, torn dandelion greens
- 5 cups loosely packed, torn red leaf lettuce
- 2-3/4 cups coarsely chopped, unpeeled apple (such as Red Delicious)
- 2 cups coarsely chopped fresh orange sections
- 2 tablespoons chopped, toasted almonds



Combine vinegar and next five ingredients; stir with a wire whisk until well blended. Set aside. Combine dandelions and lettuce, apple and orange in a large bowl; toss gently. Add vinegar mixture, tossing gently to coat. Sprinkle with almonds. *Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 1-1/2 cups).*

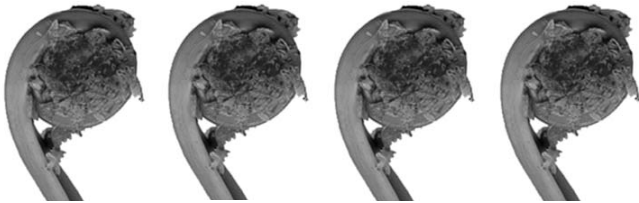
Fiddlehead Dijon

- 1-1/2 pounds fresh fiddleheads
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 cup nonfat buttermilk
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 3/4 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

Clean and prepare fiddleheads. Remove scales and wash thoroughly. Place fiddleheads in a vegetable steamer over boiling water. Cover and steam 20 minutes or until crisp-tender. Set aside and keep warm.

Combine cornstarch and buttermilk in a small saucepan; stir well. Cook over medium heat until thickened and bubbly, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, stir in mustard, lemon juice, tarragon and pepper.

Arrange fiddleheads on a serving platter. Spoon sauce over fiddleheads. Serve immediately.
Yield: 6 servings.



Fiddleheads

The ostrich fern, or fiddlehead, is a Maine delicacy that appears in the early spring – April and May. The botanical name for the ostrich fern is *Matteuccia struthiopteris*.

In the spring, the ostrich fern's distinctive "fiddleheads," the young, coiled fern leaves about an inch in diameter, are mostly green, but have papery brown scales. Nearly all ferns have fiddleheads, but the ostrich fern's are unlike any other. These fiddleheads have a paper-dry, parchment-like sheath that usually has started to peel. Most other fern fiddlehead sheaths are fuzzy or woolly.

You can also tell it's an ostrich fern if you see the previous year's leaves, broken to the ground, dead and brown, but still well attached to the root stock. Also, last year's "plumes" (the spore-bearing fronds that are still erect) are often there to identify the plant.

Gather fiddleheads in early spring, as soon as they appear within an inch or two of the ground. Carefully brush out and remove the brown scales. Then wash the heads, and cook them in lightly salted boiling water for at least 10 minutes, or steam for 20 minutes. Serve right away with melted butter.

Nutritional information: fiddleheads, canned

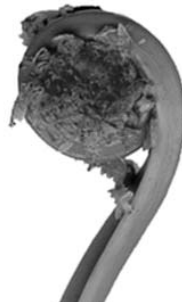
Amount: 3-1/2 ounces. Calories: 33. Fat: 0.3 grams. Protein: 3.8 grams. Vit. A: 719 (IU). Vit. C: 29 milligrams. Iron: .55 milligrams.

Composition of fresh fiddleheads

Moisture: 86.88%. Fat: 0.40%. Ash: 0.83%. Crude fiber: 1.35%. Crude protein: 4.55%. Total carbohydrate: 5.99%

Shrimp and Fiddlehead Medley

- 1 pound fiddleheads
- 6 ounces linguine, uncooked
- 6 cups water
- 1-3/4 pounds Maine shrimp, fresh or frozen
- 1 teaspoon margarine
- 2/3 cup onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup green pepper, diced
- 1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon celery seed
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice



Cut off ends of fiddleheads. Remove scales and wash thoroughly. Bring water to a boil in a large saucepan; add shrimp, and cook three to five minutes, or until done. Drain well, and set aside.

Cook fiddleheads in boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain. Coat a large, nonstick skillet with cooking spray; add margarine. Heat until margarine melts. Add onion and green pepper; sauté until crisp, but somewhat tender. Stir in fiddleheads.

Meanwhile, cook pasta as directed, without salt and fat. Drain well, set aside and keep warm. Add sliced mushrooms, thyme, pepper, salt and celery seeds to vegetable mixture; stir well. Cook, uncovered, over medium heat three to four minutes or until mushrooms are tender, stirring often. Stir in shrimp and lemon juice; cook until heated through, stirring often.

Place pasta on a large platter. Spoon shrimp mixture on top. Serve immediately. *Serves 6.*

Lamb's-Quarters

Lamb's-quarters, pigweed, goose foot and wild spinach all carry the botanical name *Chenopodium album*. It is a common garden weed and grows abundantly all over Maine.

Summer is the season for lamb's-quarters. It may be gathered when only a few inches high, or the upper leaves may be stripped off and used when the plant has grown several feet high. The long-stalked leaves, usually one to four inches long, have a white mealiness on them. The tiny flowers are numerous, greenish and in spire-like clusters. These can also be eaten. When the fruit is mature, the hard slippery coats would need to be ground before use.

To prepare, gather the young shoots with leaves. Wash thoroughly. Cook them in a small amount of boiling salted water until tender. Lamb's-quarters taste like spinach. The cooked amount will be about one-third of the amount harvested.

Orache

Another wild green that looks like lamb's-quarters bears the name orache (*Atriplex patula*), or saltbush.

Since it grows on salty soil, it is found only along the seacoast in marshy inlets and beside tidal rivers. In Maine, lamb's-quarters grows about two feet tall, with leaves two to four inches long. Orache is larger, reaching three feet or more, with leaves up to five inches long. Orache leaves are less mealy than those of lamb's-quarters and the flower clusters are looser. They can be gathered along with the heads of seed.

This green shrub contains natural salts that will appeal to many people. You can collect young shoots in the late spring or early summer, and sometimes even later in the year.

There are several varieties of orache. To prepare it, chop it and mix it with other milder-flavored chopped greens. Steam for about 20 minutes, or until tender. Serve with your favorite dressing, lemon juice or plain oil and vinegar.

Nutritional information: lamb's-quarters, chopped and boiled

Amount: 3 ounces. Calories: 29. Fat: 0.6 grams. Protein: 2.9 grams. Vit. A: 8,730 (IU). Vit. C: 33 milligrams. Iron: 63 milligrams.

Endive, Lamb's-Quarters and Orange Salad

- 5 medium-size oranges (about 3 pounds)
- 2 tablespoons tarragon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 2-1/2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 4 cups (1-inch) diagonally sliced Belgian endive (about 3 heads)
- 2 cups tightly packed, trimmed lamb's-quarters

Use a vegetable peeler to remove rind from 2 oranges; cut rind into thin strips. Cook rind in boiling water 1 minute; drain and set aside.

Peel and section all oranges. Set the sections aside. Combine vinegar and next 6 ingredients, stirring with a wire whisk.

Arrange 1 cup endive and 1/2 cup lamb's-quarters on each of 4 salad plates. Top each salad with 1/2 cup orange sections and orange rind strips.

Drizzle each salad with 1 tablespoon vinegar mixture, and serve immediately. *Yield: 4 servings.*

Warm Lentil and Lamb's-Quarters Salad With Feta Cheese

- 4 cups water
- 1-1/4 cups dried lentils
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon dried whole oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 3/4 cup (3 ounces) crumbled feta cheese
- 3 cups lamb's-quarters, well washed

Combine 4 cups water and lentils in a saucepan. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat to low, and cook 30 minutes or until tender. Drain and set aside.

Combine 2 tablespoons water, olive oil, vinegar, oregano, salt, pepper and garlic in medium bowl. Stir well. Add lentils, cheese and lamb's-quarters; toss well. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Four 1-cup servings.



Purslane

One of our best known garden weeds is called "pusley." Its correct name is purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*). It grows flat on the ground with fleshy, rubbery-like reddish green stems that branch in every direction. The leaves are oval in shape, thick, fleshy and formed close to the stem. It flowers, for a short time only, in the morning sunshine. A bright yellow bloom sits directly on the plant and has practically no stem.

When crushed between the fingers, the thick leaves of the purslane give a slimy feeling. The entire plant is edible, but if only the leafy tips are gathered, the plant will continue to grow and replace the tips for picking again.

Purslane can be washed, cooked and served just like spinach. It does not lose bulk in cooking as does spinach. Since the stems and leaves of purslane are quite fleshy, very little boiling salted water is needed in cooking.

Purslane mixed and baked with bread crumbs and eggs makes a delicate casserole. Cooked and seasoned purslane served on toast makes an appetizing addition to a meal. Even raw purslane can be served with a dressing for a very good salad.

Nutritional information: purslane, boiled

Amount: 1/2 cup. Calories: 10. Fat: 0.1 grams.
Protein: 0.9 grams. Vit. A: 107 (RE). Vit. C: 6 milligrams.
Iron: .45 milligrams.

Watch Out for Poisonous Wild Plants

Whenever you pick wild greens, be sure to know what plants may be harmful. There are some poisonous plants that are often mistaken for edible spring greens. They look harmless in their lovely shades of green, yet are deadly if eaten.

For instance, poisonous arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritima*) may be gathered along with harmless "goose



tongues" or seaside plantains (*Plantago spp*) because they are similar in appearance and grow together in coastal marshes. Contact a natural resource professional if you are unsure about a plant.

This fact sheet was revised from a previous Cooperative Extension publication, "Spring Greens for the Picking."

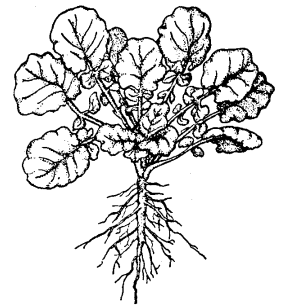
Spring Salad With Purslane and Honey Dressing

Spring Salad:

2 cups leaf lettuce, torn into pieces
2 cups purslane leaves, torn into pieces
2 cups spinach leaves, torn into pieces
10 radishes, sliced

Honey Dressing:

1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons honey
1/3 cup cider vinegar
1 cup oil



Dressing: Place all ingredients in a covered jar, and shake until well blended.

Combine all salad greens and the radishes in a salad bowl and toss. Pour dressing over greens and toss. Serve at once. *Makes 8 servings.*

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