

Mini Greens

Like most of you health-conscious folks out there, I've done my best to make sure my diet includes a wide variety of leafy greens because they're chock full of vitamins, minerals and cancer-fighting anti-oxidants.

I admit, going green hasn't always been easy. But over time I've finally acquired a taste for arugula. I make my soups "super" by adding some Swiss chard. And despite a bitter battle, I've finally conquered my aversion to kale and frequently mix the dark, leafy green into my favorite salads. Pretty good effort, I'd say.

But just when I thought I'd gone green enough, a new leafy veggie has become the darling of the farmer's market. Have you heard the buzz about the nutritional power of "mini greens?" According to the research, these seedlings are proving that good things can come in extremely small packages.

I first ran across the news about mini greens in "O" magazine then checked it out for myself. Turns out, according to the USDA, when harvested at just seven to 14 days old, these pint-size leaves can be far more nutrient-dense than their full-grown counterparts.

Studies show plants use stored nutrients to grow, so plucking the tiny seedlings early means they still have high levels of vitamins and minerals. Just keep in mind, says one study, that these "mini-me's" lack the fiber found in mature plants, so they should supplement the greens you already eat...not replace them.

For all you fashionable foodies out there, here's more good news about teensy greens. Thanks to the concentrated flavor of these diminutive standouts, they can elevate meals in taste as well as nutrition.

Give these a try:

Micro Cilantro

This fragrant green contains 11 times more lutein and zeaxanthin (nutrients that can reduce the risk of cataracts and age-related vision loss) than the same amount of mature cilantro.

Micro Red Cabbage

These slightly bitter, heart-shaped leaves outshine full-grown cabbage with roughly 260 times the beta carotene (a precursor to vitamin A that can help protect eyesight) and more than 40 times the vitamin E.

Micro Purple Mustard Greens

Just four ounces of these greens meet your recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of vitamin C (75 milligrams). Another perk: these greens may be among the tastiest, due to their spicy zing.

Micro Green Daikon Radish

These sharp, spicy leaves are vitamin E superstars, boasting 165 percent of your RDA per ounce—helping to shore up your immune system and protect tissues and organs from damage caused by free radicals. By contrast, mature leaves contain only trace amounts of the antioxidant.

Micro Garnet Amaranth (this one's new to me!)

Light red with an earthy, floral flavor... micro garnet amaranth ranks highest in vitamin K among micro greens (with more than 3 ½ times the amount in mature amaranth). Vitamin K is essential for blood clotting and may reduce the risk of bone fractures.

I'm not exactly the queen of the kitchen, but I'm thinking if I adorn my next salad with nutrient-dense micro-cilantro, would it be OK to can the kale?