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Eat more dark-green veggies for St. Patrick's Day and beyond

Kayla Colgrove, MS, RDN, ACSM-CPT
Extension Educator,
Lancaster Co.



Most Americans age 2 and older do not eat the recommended amounts of vegetables. Vegetables provide vitamins and minerals and most are low in calories and fat, so it is important to add more vegetables to your meals and snacks.

Vary Your Veggies

The most commonly eaten vegetables are potatoes and tomatoes according to the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It is important to vary your veggies throughout the week by eating from the five vegetable subgroups: dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy and other vegetables (see Table 1).

These vegetables are grouped together based on their nutrient content. Most Americans do not eat enough of dark-green, red and orange vegetables, and beans and peas. Try to focus on fitting more dark-green vegetables into your day.

4 ways to add more dark-green veggies

- Add spinach to a smoothie.

- Dip fresh broccoli in hummus, yogurt-based dip or another low-fat dip.
- Not used to eating salads with leafy dark greens? Try mixing romaine lettuce, spinach or baby kale with a lettuce you normally use.
- Liven up a pasta dish, stir fry, omelet or salad by adding spinach or chopped broccoli.

One of my favorite green smoothie recipes is the Clover Power Smoothie (see recipe below). Try this simple green smoothie for a fun and festive way to add dark-green vegetables by using spinach.

Sources:

- 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines>
- Choose MyPlate. USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. www.choosemyplate.gov

Table 1: Examples of Vegetables in Each Vegetable Subgroup:

VEGETABLE SUBGROUP	EXAMPLES
Dark-green vegetables	Broccoli, spinach, leafy salad greens (including romaine lettuce), collards, bok choy, kale, turnip greens, mustard greens, green herbs (parsley, cilantro)
Red and orange vegetables	Tomatoes, carrots, tomato juice, sweet potatoes, red peppers (hot and sweet), winter squash, pumpkin
Legumes (beans and peas)	Pinto, white, kidney, and black beans; lentils; chickpeas; lima beans (mature, dried); split peas; edamame (green soybeans)
Starchy vegetables	Potatoes, corn, green peas, lima beans (green, immature), plantains, cassava
Other vegetables	Lettuce (iceberg), onions, green beans, cucumbers, celery, green peppers, cabbage, mushrooms, avocado, summer squash (includes zucchini), cauliflower, eggplant, garlic, bean sprouts, olives, asparagus, peapods (snowpeas), beets

Source: 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans



RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Kayla Colgrove, MS, RDN, ACSM-CPT, Extension Educator, Lancaster Co.

For St. Patrick's Day, I rename this recipe "Shamrocks & Gold Smoothie" to celebrate with a festive, tasty and kid-friendly green smoothie.

CLOVER POWER SMOOTHIE
(Makes 4 cups)

- 2/3 cup 100% apple juice*
- 1/2 cup fresh baby spinach**
- 2 cups frozen pineapple chunks, no sugar added
- 1 cup low-fat vanilla yogurt***
- 1 banana

1. Add apple juice and spinach leaves to blender. Blend first to help make it smooth and avoid leafy chunks.
2. Place the remaining ingredients in the blender.
3. Blend until smooth and serve.

Kayla's notes:

*You can substitute low-fat or nonfat milk or 100% white grape juice for 100% apple juice. Adding milk instead of 100% fruit juice will lower the calories and sugar while adding extra calcium to help strengthen bones.

**You can use kale instead of spinach. Kale does have a stronger flavor than spinach. I really like using spinach since it has little to no flavor.

***To make the smoothie even healthier, use nonfat vanilla yogurt or nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt instead of low-fat vanilla yogurt.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving (1 cup): 135 Calories, 1g Total Fat, 0g Saturated Fat, 35mg Sodium, 31g Total Carbs, 24g Sugars, 2g Dietary Fiber, 2g Protein



Kayla Colgrove, Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County