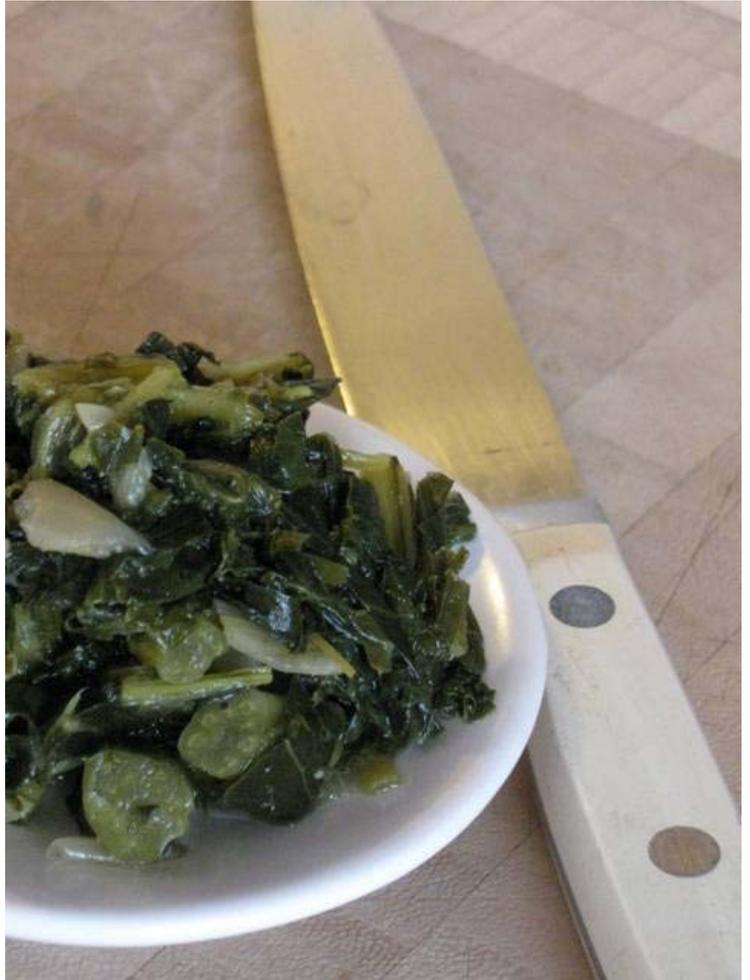


Braised Field Greens

Leafy greens are an inexpensive and nutritious dietary staple in many cultures around the world. They require a fairly advanced level of culinary knowledge and skill and therefore are seldom done well in the United States where large segments of the population are “kitchen challenged.” Greens are most often associated with less affluent regions in the south where low cost animal products like ham hocks and pork shoulder are widely incorporated into the recipe. The texture characteristics of field green leaves change throughout the year so that leaves in late spring and late autumn taken from the very same plant will require completely different cooking methods. The tender spring leaves can be lightly steamed, even with their stems attached, while late harvest leaves require substantial cooking times and must be separated from their stems which are sometimes so tough that they can't be used at all. It takes an attentive eye to be able to judge which cooking methods are appropriate using store bought greens from different parts of the country; sometimes you have to treat each one differently. Critical observation of fresh ingredients is a skill required across the full spectrum of culinary disciplines and greens are a great place to learn this skill.



The four basic field greens available in the United States are kale – flat and curly – collards, mustard greens, and turnip greens. In season they are priced about \$1.00 – \$1.50 a pound (2010 prices) and even completely out of season there can be about \$2.00 a pound, super high quality organic greens are fairly consistent year round between \$2.50 and \$4.00 a bunch.

Greens consist of a stem which is usually pretty tough, most times too tough in fact to cook with the leaves. There are no rules of thumb regarding whether to try and cook stems with leaves, it just comes with experience and unless you live south of the Mason-Dixon Line chances are that you'll only be making braised greens a few times a year, so keep good notes that you can refer back to in the future. The palate of most Americans is not accustomed to the astringent bitterness of mustard and turnip greens and therefore most people just toss them in the “don't like” category. One of the secrets of cooking a serious pot of greens, especially without using meat, is to layer many different flavor profiles and it's a lot easier to achieve that if you use mustard and turnip greens, they have a very interesting acidic quality it's hard to find anywhere else, so we're going to employ a cooking method that will make them palatable for the average American.

Curly Kale	2 bunches
Collards Greens	2 bunches
Mustard Greens	2 bunches
Turnip Greens	2 bunches
Medium onion	1-2 each
Garlic	1 bulb
Reserved Stem Liquor	
Imagine No-Chicken Broth	1 qt
Better Than Bullion No-Chicken Base	2-3 tsp (as needed)
Bragg's Aminos	1 Tbsp (as needed)
Marmite	(2-3 tsp) as needed
Pimentón	1 tsp (as needed)
Something Hot (Habanero)	½ ea (as needed)
Frontier Adobo seasoning	1 tsp (as needed)
Black Pepper	Few Turns

The first step is to clean the greens and separate the stems. Keep the different greens separate from each other; we'll be cutting and cooking them all a bit differently. As you gain experience cooking greens at different times throughout the year you'll notice that in late spring through the end of summer they will tend to come in with large clumps of dried dirt and often plain old mud on them, depending of course upon the rain fall that particular year. You'll need to use a two sink method when they are like this. Fill the sink on the right with cold water; at least 12 inches for two bunches of greens.

Work from left to right with the dirty greens on the left and the finished clean greens on the right. Use the left sink to clean each leaf, then strip the stem away and keep them all together, drop the leaf in the right sink. The idea is that the dirt will be heavier than the leaf so we'll gently lift the leaves out of the water leaving the heavier dirt on the bottom of the sink, don't stir up the water too much before you lift the greens out or you will reincorporate the dirt. Exceptionally dirty greens may need to be cleaned twice, and the sink might have to be drained, cleaned, and refilled for the next type of greens. This is the same method we use to wash all greens including lettuces, cabbages, and herbs.

Now divide the greens into two groups, those that we will cook directly and the more bitter greens which we will first blanch, then cut, and add to the pot later on. Once cleaned, the collard and kale leaves can be cut into bite sized strips and the stems of both cut into medium diced rough-cuts. Barely cover the stems with water and pressure cook them for about 10 minutes *only* then set them aside with the flavorful liquid that remains. If you don't have a pressure cooker, then allow for at least 40 minutes to simmer the stems. Blanch the mustard and turnip greens separately, then wash them and cut them in the same sized strips as the other greens. Do not reserve any of this cooking liquid. You've just removed most of the astringent bitterness associated with these greens!

Medium dice the onion and mince the garlic.

You're going to have a sizable mountain of collards and kale so choose a decent sized pot 6-8½ quarts in size and sweat the onions and garlic in a small amount of liquid. You could use any reserved vegetable liquid or even vermouth or another white wine here. Add all of the reserved stem liquor, the 1 quart of Imagine No-Chicken broth, dump in the collards and kale, and add the onions and garlic; stir constantly until the volume shrinks. Add enough liquid to just allow the greens to simmer evenly. You will need to add more as you go, but stay on the negative side of that equation, the worst thing you can do to greens is to add too much liquid. The mustard and turnip leaves have a head start and the stems have a big head start so wait about 15 minutes and add the remaining greens, then when the greens are the same color as the already cooked stems, add them as well. Keep the heat low and slow and watch them carefully adding more water as needed. About 30 minutes in, as they are starting to look blended; add all the seasonings at one time. Allow them to braise together for another 10 minutes or so and correct the seasoning for hotness and salt. It is very common in the West Indies to add scotch bonnet peppers to braised greens, but

that's not so common in the southern United States and most Americans are not accustomed to very hot things, even though some say that they are. I often use a habanero pepper, but a jalapeño pepper will do nicely and you can also use a jigger of Tabasco or nothing at all. Don't be shy with the garlic here, because we're not sautéing it in oil at the start - which seriously enhances the flavor - we can add much more of it; a bulb means a bulb, not a clove! Marmite and the Bragg's Aminos are two tactics I use to infuse my food with the "umami" or savory flavor characteristic that you lose when you remove meat from your diet. Pimentón is also part of that strategy. It's a very smoky Spanish paprika that fools your palate into thinking that there's a ham hock floating around in the pot or that I started with bacon which are two things I would have done in my former life as a professional chef cooking with salt, fat, and sugar. Pimentón is very strong and although for my palate 1 teaspoon is about right for a pot of greens this size, you may want to start with less and add it slowly if you're not accustomed to this ingredient; don't leave it out though, it's one of the things that makes these green exceptional!

Corn bread, braised greens, and rice and beans are a natural combination, and this is a wonderful addition to a traditional thanksgiving meal! A well cooked pot of mixed field greens is something about which it can be said "simple is hard" and it's as good a place as any to start learning what that phrase means.