

Spinach

Spinach is a cool-season vegetable and one of the first vegetables available in spring. A close relative to Swiss chard and beets, it may be eaten raw or cooked. Spinach is available spring and fall in Wisconsin.

Tips

Buying—Spinach may be sold loose or bagged. Select small leaves with a bright, deep green color; avoid yellow leaves.

Storing—Do not wash spinach until just before using. Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week. To freeze, blanch spinach leaves for 1–2 minutes and rinse with cold water. Drain before packing in containers.

Cooking—Wash spinach leaves well and pat dry or spin in a salad spinner. Keep in mind that spinach cooks quickly.

Uses

- Use fresh leaves in salads.
- Add to soups, stews, stir-fries, or casseroles.



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Spinach salad supreme

10 oz. fresh, young spinach leaves

6 slices bacon, baked until crisp

6 scallions, sliced

¼ lb. mushrooms, sliced

¼ c. apple cider vinegar

2 tsp. orange marmalade

2 tbsp. sugar

½ tsp. curry powder

½ tsp. dry mustard

½ tsp. salt

¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper

Dash of Tabasco

7 tbsp. canola oil

Wash and dry spinach. Crumble bacon over spinach and add scallions and mushrooms. In a bowl, combine all remaining ingredients except oil and blend well. Slowly whisk in canola oil. Toss salad with dressing. Serves 4.

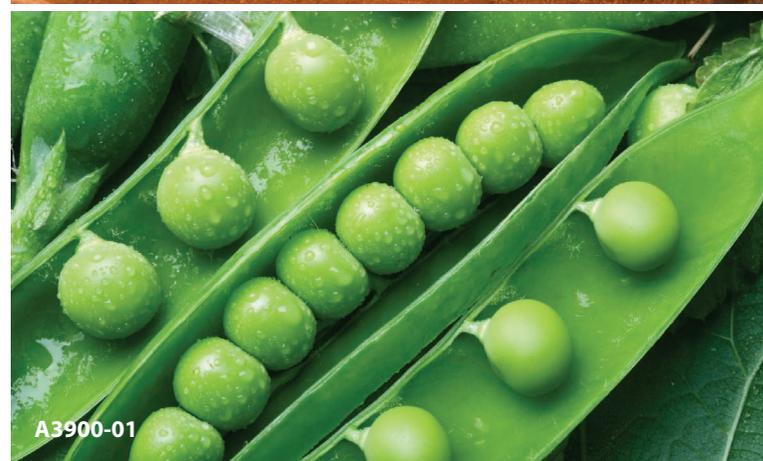
—Deb Deacon,
Farmer–Chef Connection



Spring vegetables

To many, the sight of asparagus, peas, and spinach at the farmers' market signals the return of the growing season in Wisconsin.

And when you pick up these vegetables at the market, spring will not only be in the air; it'll be on your table.



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Asparagus



Green asparagus is the primary type of asparagus found at markets, but purple and white are sometimes available. Purple asparagus is a nutty-flavored variety that is more tender than green asparagus and has 20% more sugar. White asparagus is not a different variety; rather, it is asparagus grown in the absence of light.

In Wisconsin, asparagus is available in mid to late spring.

Tips

Buying—Select spears that are firm yet tender and brightly colored. The tips should be tightly closed and compact.

Storing—Wrap in a damp cloth and store in the refrigerator.

Cooking—Cut or snap off the bottom portion of the spear. Steam asparagus upright in a tall, covered pot or simmer in a skillet in lightly salted water for 3–5 minutes.

Uses

- Wrap in foil with herbs and olive oil, and bake until tender.
- Steam asparagus and blend with garlic and spices to make guacamole.

Grilled asparagus with prosciutto and truffle honey

24 asparagus stalks

8 prosciutto slices, very thin

4 oz. Parmesan cheese

¼ c. truffle honey (recipe below)

Salt and pepper to taste

Clean and peel asparagus; blanch in boiling salted water. Quickly cool in ice bath; drain. Toss with half of truffle honey; let marinate for 10 minutes.

Lay prosciutto on plate. Grill asparagus until done; season with salt. Place asparagus on top of prosciutto. Drizzle with truffle honey, dust with black pepper, and top with finely sliced Parmesan.

Truffle honey

3 tbsp. honey

1 tbsp. truffle oil

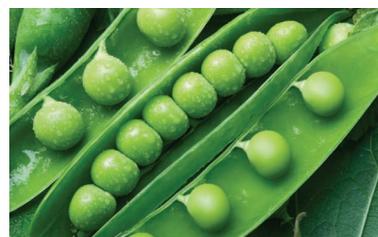
Mix together in bowl, set aside.

—Chef David Swanson, "Braise on the Go" *Traveling Culinary School*



Peas

Peas belong to the legume family and are available both fresh and dried. At markets, you'll typically see only fresh peas, including garden peas, snow peas, and sugar snap peas. Garden peas have a tough pod and the seeds are typically shelled before eating. Snow peas have edible pods and are harvested before the seeds are mature. Sugar snap peas, another edible pod pea, are a cross between garden peas and snow peas.



Peas are available from late May through July in Wisconsin.

Tips

Buying—Fresh garden and sugar snap peas should be green and appear "filled," yet not too full. Select medium-sized pods and reject those that are overly large, puffy, yellow, or dull. Look for snow peas that are flat and shiny.

Storing—Refrigerate peas in a perforated plastic bag, and use within 5 days of harvest for best quality. Keep garden peas in the pod until just before you plan to use them. You can freeze peas, but they will lose their crunchy quality after thawing. Remove garden peas from the pod before freezing.

Cooking—Prior to use, wash peas thoroughly. Shell garden peas by pinching off the stem end and pulling the string the length of the pod. For sugar snap peas, only the tips of the pod need to be removed.

Uses

- Serve fresh with dip or add to salads and stir-fries.
- Substitute thawed frozen peas for half the avocado in a guacamole recipe.

Grilled sugar snap peas

½ lb. sugar snap peas

1 tbsp. olive oil

¼ tsp. ground cumin seed

¼ tsp. curry powder

6 fresh mint leaves

1 c. plain yogurt

Salt and pepper to taste

Clean sugar snap peas and brush with olive oil. Grill for 5 minutes over moderate heat. Remove and season with cumin, curry, and mint leaves. You may add salt and pepper. Use plain yogurt as a dip.

Alternate: Brush peas with sesame seed oil; grill. Remove from heat and add soy sauce, sugar scallions, and cilantro to taste. Sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds.

—Chef Louis Danegelis,
Lee John's Catering

