

SIMPLY GOOD FOOD

Salad Greens

"Salad" once meant lettuce tossed with oil and vinegar. Today's salads include varied combinations of numerous greens as well as other vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, pasta, grain, legume and fruit, either raw or cooked, cold or warm, tied together with a flavorful dressing. Salads can curb the appetite, and help individuals consume the recommended number of servings from the food pyramid food groups. Take care in choosing the dressings and toppings as these can add unwanted fat and calories. Besides the many lettuces (iceberg, romaine, red-tip, etc.) there is an abundance of greens that can be used (such as arugula, Belgian endive, mustard greens, spinach, radicchio, watercress, dandelion greens, etc.)

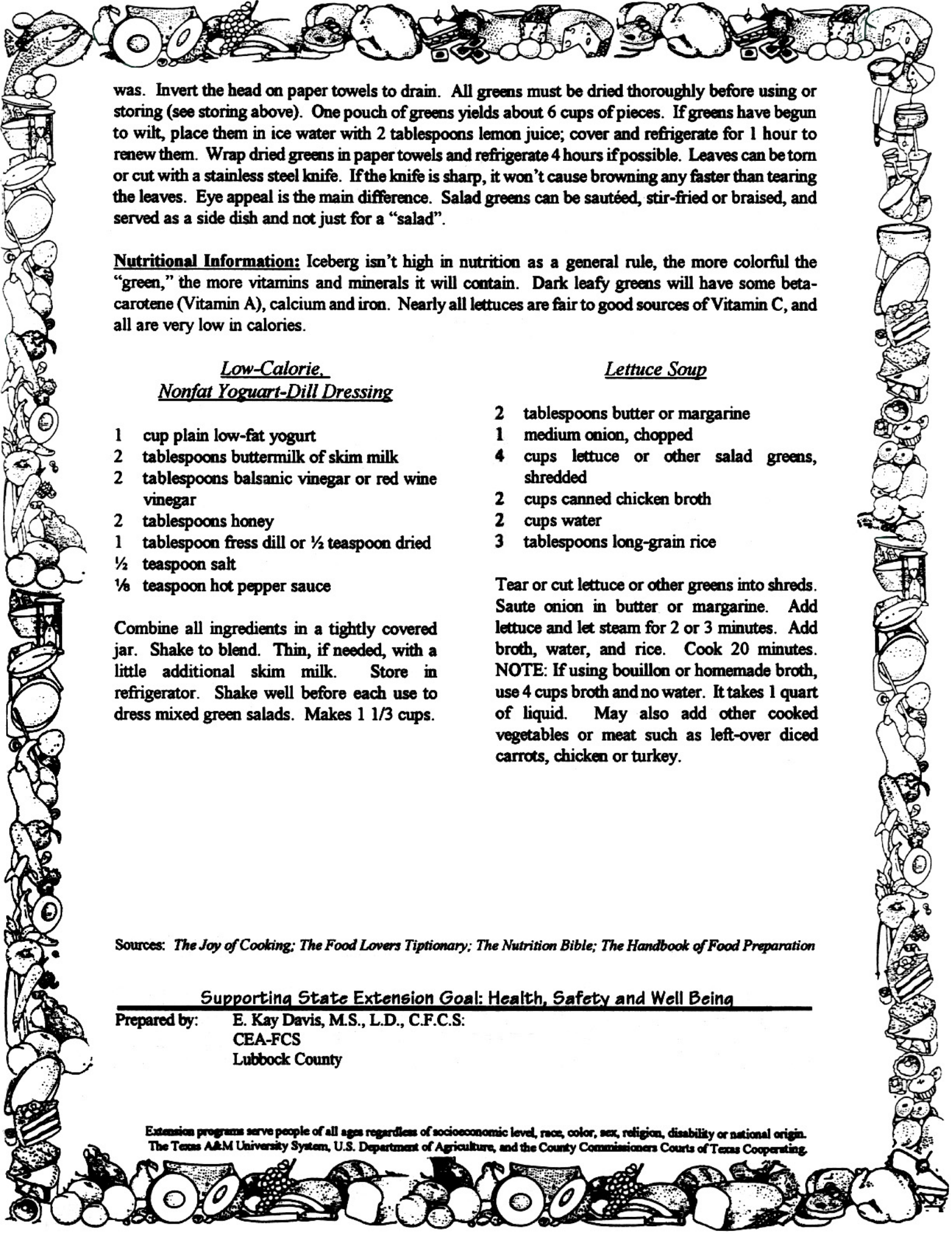
Availability/Season: Year-round for most lettuces because they are grown in hothouses. Those grown outdoors are in the markets in the late spring through the summer. Peak season for the hundreds of lettuces and greens means there is always a wide variety available.

Choose: Leaves that are fresh, tender, free from blemishes and have a healthy green color. Beet tops and ruby chard show reddish color. Iceberg and Romaine lettuce leaves should be crisp. Other lettuces will have a softer texture, but should not be wilted. Look for a bright color, medium to light green in most cases. Head lettuce should be light in weight for its size.

Avoid: Leaves with coarse, fibrous stems, yellowish green color, softness (a sign of decay) or a wilted condition. Also avoid greens with insects on them. Aphids, especially, are hard to both see and to wash away. Heads of iceberg lettuce that are hard or lack green color (a sign of over-maturity), which can develop discoloration in the center of the leaves (the "mid-ribs"), and have less flavor. Avoid heads that are irregular in shape or have bumps on top (which indicates overgrown central stems). Check the tips of lettuce for tip burn, a tan, or brown area (dead tissue) around the margins of the leaves. Slight discoloration of the outer, wrapper leaves will not affect quality, but serious discoloration or soft decay should be avoided.

Store: Wash greens as soon as possible to help them last longer. Thoroughly dry greens before using or storing using a salad spinner or by shaking off the excess moisture and laying them out on a double layer of paper towels or a dish towel and then blotting the surfaces dry. Store clean greens wrapped loosely in dry paper towels, in a tightly sealed plastic bag. Remove as much air from the bag as possible when sealing it. Refrigerate up to one week.

Preparation: Cut off the bottom to separate the leaves. Put the leaves in a sink or large container full of ice water. Swish greens around, then let them stand for a few minutes to allow the dirt to sink to the bottom. Iceberg lettuce is different. Remove the core by firmly smacking it against the counter top. Grab the core with your fingers, twist, and lift out. Run cold water into the cavity where the core



was. Invert the head on paper towels to drain. All greens must be dried thoroughly before using or storing (see storing above). One pouch of greens yields about 6 cups of pieces. If greens have begun to wilt, place them in ice water with 2 tablespoons lemon juice; cover and refrigerate for 1 hour to renew them. Wrap dried greens in paper towels and refrigerate 4 hours if possible. Leaves can be torn or cut with a stainless steel knife. If the knife is sharp, it won't cause browning any faster than tearing the leaves. Eye appeal is the main difference. Salad greens can be sautéed, stir-fried or braised, and served as a side dish and not just for a "salad".

Nutritional Information: Iceberg isn't high in nutrition as a general rule, the more colorful the "green," the more vitamins and minerals it will contain. Dark leafy greens will have some beta-carotene (Vitamin A), calcium and iron. Nearly all lettuces are fair to good sources of Vitamin C, and all are very low in calories.

*Low-Calorie,
Nonfat Yogurt-Dill Dressing*

- 1 cup plain low-fat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons buttermilk of skim milk
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill or ½ teaspoon dried
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ⅓ teaspoon hot pepper sauce

Combine all ingredients in a tightly covered jar. Shake to blend. Thin, if needed, with a little additional skim milk. Store in refrigerator. Shake well before each use to dress mixed green salads. Makes 1 1/3 cups.

Lettuce Soup

- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 cups lettuce or other salad greens, shredded
- 2 cups canned chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons long-grain rice

Tear or cut lettuce or other greens into shreds. Sauté onion in butter or margarine. Add lettuce and let steam for 2 or 3 minutes. Add broth, water, and rice. Cook 20 minutes. NOTE: If using bouillon or homemade broth, use 4 cups broth and no water. It takes 1 quart of liquid. May also add other cooked vegetables or meat such as left-over diced carrots, chicken or turkey.

Sources: *The Joy of Cooking; The Food Lovers Tiptonary; The Nutrition Bible; The Handbook of Food Preparation*

Supporting State Extension Goal: Health, Safety and Well Being

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