

# Star-Telegram

## Kale is the other green, leafy vegetable

Posted Wednesday, Mar. 28, 2012

BY TERESA GUBBINS

Special to the Star-Telegram

Dark, curly and a little feisty, kale is a rising star in the produce world, currently reigning as the hottest green to eat. Everyone wants kale - whether it is tossed in a salad, braised as a side dish or blended into a kelly-green powerhouse smoothie.

This represents a big change in fortunes for kale, once held in such low regard that restaurants often used it as window dressing on a salad bar, tucked between bins of shredded carrot and Romaine lettuce to provide a pretty green backdrop.

"I used to think of kale as the garnish on the Denny's breakfast plate, right beneath the slice of orange," says Leslie Needleman, owner of Gem juice bar in Dallas, where kale is used in salads, smoothies and juices. "I didn't grow up with kale, except to toss it aside and not understand the concept of the garnish. But it's such a healthy potion - it does everything the other veggies do combined, all packaged into a neat, curly leaf."

Kale has moved to the center of the plate at foodie-forward restaurants like the new, buzzy Woodshed Smokehouse, where it is featured in a salad with thin slices of sweet apple and shavings of Manchego cheese. The finishing touch: The greens are tossed in pork fat that is still warm. The warmth softens the kale, giving it a lush mouth feel; chile-dusted pumpkin seeds add zip.

"I've been into kale lately," says Woodshed chef-owner Tim Love. "It's not only good for you, it's sturdy - it holds up really well."

Love is usually ahead of the pack, and so is Graham Dodds, chef at Central 214 in Dallas, who has been a longtime kale devotee.

"I used to ask local produce growers for it, but nobody would grow it," he says. "Now everybody's using it. I always did it as a side dish to accompany meats. At Central 214, it's the first time I'm doing it as a salad. I flash-fry it in olive oil, until it gets a little char, and then add watermelon radish and top it with ricotta salata. I'm creating a new menu for spring, but everybody's wanting me to keep the kale salad, they like it so much."

Part of the appeal is its novelty - it's the green du jour. It's also a bit of an acquired taste, as the leaves can be firm and slightly bitter.

Until recently, kale was a "poor man's food," says vegan chef and cooking instructor Gail Blair.

"Not that long ago, kale, collards and food like that was eaten by folks in poverty," she says. "My grandmother, who just passed away in October, was from Athens, in East Texas. She was a cotton farmer, and they were dirt poor. They ate collard greens, mustard greens, kale and corn bread. It had protein. They had meat maybe once a month."

Then kale became the darling of vegans and vegetarians, for its nutritional density, and it began to be used as an ingredient in smoothies. Kale is packed with nutrients including vitamins A, C and K. It is high in fiber, and has more calcium than milk and more iron than beef.

"It's the new red meat for vegans - it's the mainstay of a lot of vegans' diets," says Kathryn Lorusso, of VegOut Catering, a natural foods caterer based in Bedford. "It's so high in calcium. Vegans don't drink milk or have dairy products and are always looking to get calcium from plant sources; kale and collards are at the top of the plant food chain when it comes to calcium. For calcium and bones and menopause issues, you can't beat kale and collards."

### 'Massaging' kale

Amy McNutt, founder of Spiral Diner, discovered kale when she was in college in Los Angeles in the late '90s.

"There was a place out there, Real Food Daily, that had a kale in peanut sauce that I loved," she says. She and co-owner Lindsey Akey just put kale on the menu at Spiral Diner as a blue plate special.

"We're serving it as a cold salad, but the kale itself is cooked," she says. "I like it when it's cooked. Raw kale can be rough. Lindsey has a good trick: She 'massages' the raw leaves with salt and oil, and it makes them more tender."

Massaging is the secret to kale, says Leslie Needleman of Gem.

"After you wash it, you sprinkle it with sea salt and massage it - then you put on your vinaigrette dressing," she says. "It softens it. You can massage it to the point where it almost has consistency that it's steamed or sauteed. It breaks it down enough to make it ready to party."

Other tried-and-true ways of making kale more edible include chopping the leaves into small, skinny pieces; and tossing the kale in its

dressing ahead of time to help it "marinate." When you're chopping kale for salad, remove the thick spine that runs down the middle of each leaf.

As kale's fortunes have risen, so have the varieties of kale, as well as the range of kale products.

In addition to the original dark green curly variety, you can find narrow tender kale called "lacinato," "dinosaur" or "Tuscan." There's a Chinese kale, and kale in a rainbow of colors, such as red and purple. You can buy "kale chips" on the snack-food aisle, and grocery stores like Whole Foods Market and Central Market have kale in their prepared-foods sections.

Kale is the rallying cry for participants in the Engine 2 Diet, the plant-based eating program devised by Austin firefighter-turned-author Rip Esselstyn. The group meets monthly at some Whole Foods Markets. You can spot participants by their "kale" T-shirts. Kale has even hit the pop culture radar, thanks to a Vermont couple whose "Eat more kale" T-shirt drew a lawsuit from Chick-fil-A ([www.eatmorekale.com](http://www.eatmorekale.com)).

"Kale was a nonentity for so long – it was like, 'What the heck's kale?'" says Lorusso. "Nobody even said the word 'kale.' Now everyone's talking about kale."

### Roasted kale chips with Parmigiano-Reggiano

Makes 4 1-cup servings

1 bunch kale

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon chili powder

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

2 tablespoons finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper. Trim tough stems from kale and discard; cut large leaves into 2-inch pieces (leave any small leaves whole).
2. Place in a large bowl, drizzle with oil and toss. Add chili powder and salt and toss again. Arrange kale on baking sheets in a single layer; bake until crispy and the edges just begin to brown, about 12 minutes.
3. Remove from oven and let cool for 2 minutes on the baking sheets. Transfer to a bowl and toss with Parmigiano-Reggiano. Nutritional analysis per serving: 52 calories, 4 grams fat, 2 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams protein, 2 milligrams cholesterol, 174 milligrams sodium, trace dietary fiber, 73 percent of calories from fat.

— Whole Foods Market

### Lemon-ricotta kale dip

Makes 12 1/4-cup servings

1 bunch green kale, stems and tough ribs stripped out and discarded, leaves sliced

1 small onion, sliced

4 garlic cloves

3/4 cup part-skim ricotta cheese

1 1/2 tablespoons nutritional yeast

Juice and zest of 1 lemon

1/4 teaspoon sea salt

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste

1. In a large saucepan, combine kale, onion, garlic and 1/4 cup water. Set over medium heat, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are very tender, about 12 minutes; add more water a tablespoon at a time if the pan dries out.
2. Transfer vegetables and any liquid in the pan to a food processor and let cool a few minutes. Add ricotta, nutritional yeast, lemon juice and zest, salt and cayenne. Process until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and serve. Nutritional analysis per serving: 33 calories, 1 gram fat, 3 grams carbohydrates, 3 grams protein, 5 milligrams cholesterol, 62 milligrams sodium, 1 gram dietary fiber, 35 percent of calories from fat.

— Whole Foods Market

---

### Sauteed shrimp and kale

Serves 4-6 people

4 ounces applewood smoked bacon, large dice

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

1 pound 16/20 shrimp, peeled and deveined

1 chile d'arbol, cut into thin rings

2 cups kale, washed and cut into strips

3/4 cup cherry tomatoes, cut in half

2 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced

1/4 tablespoon kosher salt

1/8 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

2 ounces unsalted butter

1/3 cup feta cheese, crumbled

1. Heat the bacon and olive oil in a medium-size saute pan over low heat for 2 minutes, stirring often.
2. Lightly sprinkle the shrimp with salt and pepper. Add the shrimp to the saute pan and increase the heat to medium. Cook for 2 minutes and then stir, making sure to flip the shrimp.
3. Add the chile, kale, cherry tomatoes, garlic, salt and pepper to the pan. Cook for 2 minutes. Gently stir to let the kale finish wilting. Using a slotted spoon, transfer all contents of the pan to a serving bowl, leaving the liquid in the pan.
4. Add the butter to the remaining liquid and return to the stove over high heat. Continually swirl the pan over the flame until the butter is completely melted. Drizzle the pan sauce over the shrimp and kale. Garnish with the crumbled feta cheese. Nutritional analysis per serving, based on 4: 493 calories, 35 grams fat, 8 grams carbohydrates, 35 grams protein, 239 milligrams cholesterol, 1,132 milligrams sodium, 1 gram dietary fiber, 65 percent of calories from fat.

— Chef Molly McCook, Ellerbe Fine Foods, Fort Worth

---

### Woodshed Smokehouse three-kale salad

Serves 4 to 6

4 to 6 slices bacon

1 bunch Tuscan (or dinosaur or lacinato) kale

1 bunch curly green kale

1 bunch colored kale, such as purple

1 green apple

1 quart loosely packed celery greens, roughly chopped

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Salt and pepper to taste

1/2 cup manchego or Parmesan cheese, shaved into paper-thin slices

Pumpkin seeds

1. Cook bacon on low heat until crisp. Remove from heat and let cool slightly; reserve liquid fat in pan. Remove bacon and chop into small

pieces or crush with hands; return to the bacon fat.

2. Remove thick stems from kale, and tear the leaves into medium-size pieces. Core apple and cut into paper-thin slices. Combine with kale and celery leaves in large bowl.

3. Whisk together olive oil and lemon juice. Toss with greens. Add salt and pepper. Gently toss in bacon and liquid fat. Top with cheese shavings and pumpkin seeds.

Nutritional analysis per serving, based on 4: 189 calories, 13 grams fat, 11 grams carbohydrates, 9 grams protein, 13 milligrams cholesterol, 316 milligrams sodium, 3 grams dietary fiber, 60 percent of calories from fat.

— Chef Tim Love, Woodshed Smokehouse, Fort Worth

[Looking for comments?](#)