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Food safety tips for leafy green vegetables

Leafy greens are leafy vegetables that are an important part of a healthy eating pattern. Leafy greens usually have crisp green leaves and stalks, and should be eaten raw or lightly cooked to preserve the nutrients.

Popular types of leafy greens include:

- lettuce
- arugula
- bok choy
- spinach

Because leafy greens are often eaten raw, they can be a source of food poisoning.

By making sure they are properly handled, washed, prepared, and stored, you can enjoy the health benefits of leafy greens and help prevent food poisoning for yourself and your family.



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Leafy greens and food poisoning

While leafy greens do not naturally contain bacteria that can make you sick, the leaves can become contaminated because they are grown close to the ground.

Eating leafy greens that have been contaminated with harmful bacteria can make you sick. Contaminated leafy greens have been linked to cases of food poisoning caused by Salmonella and E. coli.

Leafy greens can become contaminated in the field by:

- soil
- contaminated water
- animals
- improperly composted manure

They can also be contaminated by bacteria:

- during and after harvest from handling, storing, and transporting
- at the grocery store, in the refrigerator, or from counters and cutting boards (through cross-contamination with harmful bacteria from raw meat, poultry, or seafood)

Shopping

- Look for leaves that are crisp. Avoid ones that are wilted or brown.
- If buying ready-to-eat, bagged, pre-washed leafy greens, make sure they are refrigerated.

Chilling/storing

- Store leafy greens in the refrigerator for up to seven days. Discard when leaves become wilted or brown.
- Bagged, ready-to-eat, pre-washed leafy greens should also be refrigerated and used before the expiration date.

Cleaning

Washing your hands and following proper cleaning techniques can help you avoid cross-contamination and prevent the spread of food poisoning.

- Use warm water and soap to thoroughly wash all utensils, countertops, and cutting boards before and after handling leafy greens.

Did you know?

Every year, more than 4 million Canadians get food poisoning. Many of these illnesses could be prevented by following proper food handling and preparation techniques.

Preparing

Wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, before and after handling leafy greens.

1. Discard outer leaves.
2. Wash your leafy greens under fresh, cool running water. There is no need to use anything other than water to wash leafy greens. Washing them gently with water is as effective as using produce cleansers.
3. Keep rinsing until all of the dirt has been washed away.

Don't soak leafy greens in a sink full of water. They can become contaminated by bacteria in the sink.

Ready-to-eat leafy greens

Ready-to-eat leafy greens sold in sealed packages and labelled as washed, pre-washed or triple washed, do not need to be washed again.

What the Government of Canada does to protect you

The Government of Canada is committed to food safety.

Together with industry, we work to identify best practices that can be used to help prevent contamination of fresh produce throughout the food system, from the field to the store. In addition, inspection and enforcement activities conducted by the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) work to ensure that steps taken by producers, manufacturers, and importers have been effective and that the foods available to Canadians are safe.

For more information

- [Food recalls and advisories](#)
- [Report product-related health and safety concerns](#)
- [Be Food Safe](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)
- [Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education](#)

[For industry and professionals](#)

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