

News Notes To Parents

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Services, Health And Human Sciences March 2026

Green, Green, the more you eat...

March is the month I begin to think about green again after going through winter without. March is the start of Spring, the month of St. Patrick's Day, and when some folks begin thinking about planting seeds for their gardens. Speaking of green and gardening, leafy greens are generally a cool season crop with short growing periods. They can be planted in late spring and again in early fall because they thrive in more mild temperatures.

There are many varieties of leafy greens offering assorted flavors and textures. Using a few different types of greens can help make a salad much more interesting and enjoyable. More than that, leafy greens can be incorporated into eggs at breakfast, casseroles, pastas, soups, and stews towards the end of their cooking process.

Creating a mix of colors, textures, and shapes can help turn the vegetable dish into something to get more excited about. Romaine lettuce provides a crisp texture and is often used when making Caesar type salads. Arugula is actually a part of the mustard family and gives a distinct peppery flavor that can be a nice addition to a sandwich. Mizuna is recognized for its fringed leaves and tangy flavor that is sometime incorporated into salad mixtures. Spinach is one of the more well known, dark green varieties. Spinach has a fairly mild flavor that becomes increasingly savory as the leaves turn more wrinkled and curlier. Red leaf lettuce gives the salad more color making it more aesthetically pleasing and nutrient dense. Red offers different nutrients than its green counterparts.



The more colorful our plates and the richer those colors are, the more nutrients we gain. The darker the green, the richer in nutrients. This concept makes spinach a great choice. The flavors are mild and it's pretty versatile in its uses. Spinach can be eaten raw or cooked. Cooking methods include sautéing, cooking in the microwave, and steaming on a stovetop. Remove any large, tough stems from the leaves. For best cleaning practices, soak leaves in a bowl of lukewarm water and leave them for several minutes to remove dirt. Drain the water and rinse the leaves again under a light stream of cool water. Allow spinach leaves to dry almost completely on a paper towel prior to storage. Store in a plastic bag with a damp paper towel in the refrigerator for 4-5 days. Spinach can be frozen for up to 5 months.

Tip: Salad dressing is great! Vinegar and oil, regular, or reduced fat are all ok! Dressing can actually be beneficial when used in portions of 1-2 tablespoons at a time. Vitamins A, D, E, and K are all fat-soluble vitamins. Vitamins A and K are often found in lettuce and greens and will be better absorbed in our bodies when we add a little fat to the mix. Other sources of fat that can be added to a salad are avocados, shredded cheese, egg, sunflower seeds, and walnuts.

Jessica Riffle, HHS Educator Purdue Extension – Fulton County

Photo Credit: Canva

Fix It and Forget It



Basic Tips for Crock Pot Successes

To test a crock pot's accuracy, heat two quarts of water on Low for eight hours and check the temperature immediately after removing the lid. It should be between 180°F and 200°F.

Temperatures above 200°F may overcook food, while temperatures below 180°F are unsafe and indicate the crock pot should be replaced.

Low cooking temperatures range from 180–200°F and High is about 300°F. One hour on High equals two to two and a half hours on Low. Crock pots should be filled halfway to three-quarters full, with vegetables placed on the bottom and meat on top. Do not remove the lid during the first quarter of cooking. Cooked food should not be stored in the crock pot.

For easier cleanup, use a liner or spray the crock pot. Juices can be thickened by cooking uncovered on High at the end or by stirring in a cornstarch and cold-water mixture. Food must reach 140°F within four hours for safety. Frozen food should not be cooked or reheated in a crock pot; reheat by other methods first, then keep warm on Low. In the event of a power outage, discard food if you are not home, or finish cooking immediately by another method if you are home. Store leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate within two hours, reheating by other means before holding warm in the crock pot.

Credit: Linda Souchon - Purdue Extension-Johnson County Office

Slow Cooker Salsa Chicken

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 2 (16-oz.) containers medium salsa
- 8 cups hot cooked rice

Directions:

1. Place chicken in a 6-quart slow cooker; sprinkle evenly with salt and pepper. Add salsa.
2. Cover and cook on HIGH until a thermometer inserted in thickest portion of thighs registers 165°F, about 2 hours. Turn off slow cooker. Transfer chicken to a large heatproof bowl and let cool 10 minutes.
3. Shred meat into bite-size pieces. Add liquid in slow cooker to chicken; toss to coat. Serve over hot rice.



Credit: Slow-Cooker Salsa Chicken Recipe

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News Notes To Parents is a product of Purdue Extension—Wells County. If you have comments or need information, call (260) 824-6412. The office is located at 1240 4-H Park Road, Bluffton IN 46714. Tell someone about us!