



Vegetables for Wellness: Kentucky Cabbage

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From June through July and September through November, Kentuckians can enjoy the freshness and flavor of locally grown cabbage. Cabbage, quite popular for the last 2,500 years, was originally found growing wild on the shores of England, southern Europe, and Denmark. If you don't have a garden of your own, farmers' markets offer green cabbage along with other seasonal fruits and vegetables.

Cabbage varieties include green, red, savoy, and napa. Green cabbage is grown more often than the red or savoy types, but red cabbage has become increasingly popular in cooked dishes and in salads for color. The savoy varieties are grown for slaws and salads. Varieties that take a longer time to mature in the field usually grow larger heads, which are more suitable for making sauerkraut than those that are quick growing. The publication *Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens—1999* (ID-133), produced by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, has more information on successful varieties. It can be viewed on the Web at www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm.

Nutrition Facts

There are good reasons to try to consume all the cabbage from the garden or to buy a plentiful amount from your local farmers' market. Like broccoli, cabbage is a member of the cruciferous vegetable family. That means it may reduce the risk of some forms of cancer, including colorectal cancer. Cabbage is also low in fat and in calories—1 cup has 24 calories. Vitamin A, needed for vision, normal growth, reproduction, and a healthy immune system, can be found in abundance in Chinese cabbage. As a strong antioxidant, vitamin A also has great potential for preventing disease. About 20 percent of our daily need for vitamin A can be supplied by a half-cup of cooked Chinese cabbage.



Selection

Choose well-trimmed heads of cabbage that are heavy for their size and solid for the variety of cabbage that is being purchased. Leaves should be crisp and free of insects and decay. Yellow, wilted leaves indicate age. Avoid burst or broken heads. Farmers' markets usually have a good selection of cabbage, allowing you to purchase what you need, whether it's for dinner or to preserve.

Storage

Fresh, uncut heads of cabbage can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. However, if you plan to eat the cabbage raw or make sauerkraut, it is best to use it within a few days, while the sugar content is highest. The cabbage should be loosely covered. To prevent molding, wash cabbage just before use. Savoy cabbage deteriorates rapidly, so buy it just before you plan to use it.

Preparation

Cabbage may be served in a variety of ways. For example, you can stuff it; scallop it; make coleslaw, freezer slaw, and sauerkraut; and use it in soup. One medium head of cabbage, about 2½ pounds, yields about 9 cups of shredded raw cabbage or 7 cups of cooked cabbage.

Remove any wilted leaves, then rinse. To cut, use a large, heavy knife to halve or quarter the cabbage through the stem. Cut around the core and remove it. Cut the head into wedges or slice it into thin shreds or ribbons, depending on how you plan to use it. The inner part of the core can be sliced and substituted in recipes calling for water chestnuts.

Because of the potential for spoilage caused by bacteria, you should follow USDA-recommended procedures when making homemade sauerkraut.

Instructions for making sauerkraut are outlined in *Preparing and Canning Fermented Foods and Pickled Vegetables* (FCS 3-330), a publication that is available from your local Extension office or on the Web at <www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/fcs3/fcs3330/fcs3330.htm>.

To boil: The strong—some people say unpleasant—odor of cooked cabbage has kept it from many dinner tables. Many people think of boiled cabbage as unpleasant smelling, but the cabbage is not to blame. The odor results from overcooking. Cabbage contains substances that break down into smelly sulfur compounds. The longer the cabbage is cooked, the smellier these compounds become, and the use of an aluminum pan causes the smell to be even stronger. To reduce the smell, cook cabbage until just tender in a stainless steel pan. For the mildest flavor, cook cabbage that has been cut into quarters or large wedges in boiling water until the pieces are tender, about 10 minutes for green cabbage and 15 minutes for red cabbage. Season if desired, drain, and serve hot.

To steam: Cabbage can be steamed in wedges, shreds, or whole leaves. It should be steamed in a steamer basket over 1 to 2 inches of boiling water. Allow about 15 minutes for red cabbage wedges and about 12 minutes for green cabbage wedges. Cabbage should be cooked until it is tender but still crisp. Ingredients that bring out the natural flavor of cabbage include apples, pears, raisins, curry, caraway, dill, and onions. For additional flavor combinations, try adding small amounts of anise, basil, celery seeds, mustard, fennel, nutmeg, oregano, black pepper, or tarragon.

Scalloped Cabbage

4 cups cabbage, shredded
1 cup American, Parmesan, or Swiss cheese, grated
1 cup canned tomatoes
Salt and pepper to taste

Cook cabbage in small amount of boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain. Grease large baking dish, using vegetable cooking spray or margarine. Place cabbage and tomatoes in layers and season if desired, sprinkling each layer with cheese and ending with a cheese layer. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes. Yield: 8 servings.

Nutritional Analysis: 75 calories, 6 g protein, 4 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 4 g fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 441 mg sodium.

—From the Mercer County Cooperative Extension Service.

Cabbage Pecan Toss

4 cups coarsely shredded cabbage
1/2 cup shredded carrot
1/4 cup sliced onion
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon margarine or butter, melted
1 teaspoon Dijon-style mustard
1/4 cup chopped pecans, toasted

In a large pan combine cabbage, carrot, onion, and 2 tablespoons water. Cook, covered, over medium heat for 5 to 7 minutes. Drain. Add margarine or butter, mustard, and pecans. Stir together and serve hot. Yield: 8 servings. *Nutritional Analysis:* 55 calories, 1 g protein, 4 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 4 g fat, 4 mg cholesterol, 40 mg sodium.

For additional in-season recipes, check the home page of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, on the Web at <www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs>.

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