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Farmer In The Field

Popeye knew what he was talking about

BONNIE SWANK

Spinach, like strawberries, is one of those crops that grows all year. It is grown in four areas within California: Southern California's Imperial and Riverside counties; the Southern Coast's Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties; the Central Coast counties of Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz; and the Stanislaus and Tulare counties of the San Joaquin Valley. Out of these four areas, the Central Coast produces half of the spinach grown in California.

Spinach is a cool weather crop and matures quickly. Baby spinach can be harvested within 21 to 40 days from planting; teenage spinach 26 to 50 days; bunched 32 to 62 days; and freezer 48 to 90 days.

Spinach is often referred to as a super food, and rightfully so. The list of nutrients found in the vegetable is extensive. Out of 21 listed nutrients, the first 13 are rated "excellent" under the World's Healthiest Foods Rating. The next six rate as "very good" and the last four are "good."

When you consider one cup of cooked spinach is only 41 calories, you may want to rethink their apple a day

and try spinach instead.

Researchers have identified more than a dozen different flavonoid compounds in spinach that function as anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer agents. Flavonoid and carotenoid nutrients also provide antioxidant benefits. Here are some other important benefits from eating spinach:

Cancer prevention: Chlorophyll found in spinach has shown to be effective in blocking carcinogenic effects of heterocyclic amines.

Asthma prevention: High amounts of beta-carotene found in foods like spinach can help prevent asthma.

Lowering blood pressure: Consuming high amounts of potassium helps to counteract the effects of sodium. I was surprised to learn one cup of cooked spinach has 300mg more potassium than one cup of banana.

Bone health: Vitamin K helps promote strong bones lowering the risk of fractures.

Promotes regularity: Spinach is high in fiber and water content, helping to prevent constipation.

Healthy skin and hair: Vitamin A is necessary for the production of sebum,

which keeps hair moisturized. Vitamin A is also essential for the growth of skin and hair.

Hair loss prevention: Iron-deficiency can cause hair loss, and spinach is an excellent source of iron.

After learning so much about the health benefits of spinach, a vegetable I happen to like very much, I am off to find out why we aren't growing this super food at Swank Farms.

Bonnie and her husband, Dick Swank, are owners of Swank Farms in Hollister. Contact them at 831.637.4704. SwankFarms.com

Garlic Sautéed Spinach

Recipe courtesy of Ina Garten 2002, Barefoot Contessa Style

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 pounds baby spinach leaves
- 2 tablespoons good olive oil
- 2 tablespoons chopped garlic (6 cloves)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- Lemon
- Sea or kosher salt, optional

DIRECTIONS

Rinse the spinach well in cold water to make sure it's very clean. Spin it dry in a salad spinner, leaving just a little water clinging to the leaves.

In a very large pot or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil and sauté the garlic over medium heat for about 1 minute, but not until it's browned. Add all the spinach, salt and pepper to the pot, toss it with the garlic and oil, cover the pot, and cook it for 2 minutes. Uncover the pot, turn the heat on high, and cook the spinach for another minute, stirring with a wooden spoon, until all the spinach is wilted. Using a slotted spoon, lift the spinach to a serving bowl and top with the butter, a squeeze of lemon, and a sprinkling of sea or kosher salt. Serve hot.