

Seasonal Eating
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Florentine Your Dishes
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With the cooler, wet weather the growing season is behind this year. At the farmers market vendor meeting the other day, most said they won't have much until mid-June or so and the strawberries have been delayed as well. But spinach loves the cool and so we'll focus on this fabulous vegetable and have some Florentine dishes until the rest comes in. The dictionary defines Florentine as served or dressed with spinach and that's exactly what I did to my chicken this week.

A cool season green, spinach is full of nutrition. A one cup serving has 56% of the vitamin A needs for the day, is a good source of vitamin C and folate and is extremely high in vitamin K.

I love spinach on a sandwich in place of lettuce – it adds more flavor and more nutrition. I also use spinach raw in salads. Raw used to be the only way I ate spinach but now I enjoy it in all kinds of dishes like quiche, lasagna and casseroles.



The frozen spinach is a good way to get it year round, but in the spring I like to use fresh. It cooks down a lot, so don't worry when your pan is overflowing with the fresh spinach, it will cook down to a little pile. When using the spinach in something like a quiche or lasagna, be sure to drain the frozen well or to cook out the liquid of the fresh first or your dish will be watery. For frozen, I use a mesh strainer and press the defrosted spinach until no more liquid comes out and then fluff it up and separate the pieces.

So this week I made a wonderful Florentine chicken with a wine sauce. This makes a fabulous gravy that you can eat with the chicken or serve with rice or bread to sop up the goodness. The filling is simply onion, mushrooms and spinach cooked down and put inside the chicken with slices of Muenster cheese. Muenster is a mild creamy white cheese that melts like a dream. It's a little expensive so you can substitute a Monterey Jack or other melty mild cheese. The cheese also browns on the top for a beautiful, caramelized "skin". The sauce is simply canned cream soup with a little sherry or white wine added. I found a new product where cream of mushroom and cream of chicken soups are combined into one can. A lot of times I use one can of each but when you only need one can, this is perfect. You could certainly just use the cream of chicken. Also you can substitute chicken broth or water for the wine.

So Florentine your dishes with nutritious and delicious spinach this spring. Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating (bedford.tennessee.edu).

Stuffed Chicken Florentine with Creamy Wine Sauce

2 tablespoons butter
1/2 large onion, chopped
8 ounces mushrooms, chopped
8 ounces fresh baby spinach
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
8 slices Muenster cheese
1 (10 1/2-ounce) can cream of chicken soup
2 tablespoons dry sherry wine or chicken broth

In a large skillet, melt butter over medium high heat. Add onion and mushrooms and sauté a few minutes. Add the spinach, pepper and salt. Sauté until most of the liquid has evaporated. Let cool slightly. Meanwhile cut a pocket into the side of each chicken breast, cutting up to but not through the other side to make a large opening. Take a slice of cheese and break in half putting one half in the pocket. Add one-fourth of the spinach mixture to the pocket and top with the other half of the slice of cheese. Place the stuffed chicken breast in a greased casserole dish. Continue with the other 3 breasts. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper on top of each breast and top with another slice of cheese on each. Stir together the soup and wine and pour over the top. Bake at 400 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until chicken is cooked through.