

Seasonal Eating
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Weeknight Dinner with Spring Kale
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Spring is a great time for cool season crops like greens. Kale is one of those and has a nickname of “Queen of the Greens”. It is nutritious and versatile and well worth adding to the spring garden and the spring plate.

There are several types of kale. Curly kale has ruffled, curly leaves with a deep green color and is often found as a garnish on salad bars. It has a slightly bitter taste and sturdy texture. This is probably the most common variety found in grocery stores. It is good for sauteing and added to soups. You can also make kale chips by baking it in the oven with a little olive oil until crispy. Another type is lacinato kale, also known as dinosaur or Tuscan kale. This type has long, narrow leaves with a dark blue-green color and bumpy texture. It is a little more mild, sweet and tender than curly kale. It is good for raw salads, pasta and quick sautés. A third type of kale is Red Russian with its flat, fringed leaves and purple-red stems. Tender and sweet and less bitter, this type is best in raw salads, stir-fries and quick sautés.



One of the keys to preparing kale is to remove the tougher stems that run down the center. You can hold the kale by the stem and pull it through your other thumb and index finger to strip the tender leaves from the stem. The kale will soften with cooking but if you are using it in a salad and it is older and larger, you may want to massage the cut or torn leaves slightly with some acid like lemon juice or vinegar and olive oil to break down the tougher fibers a little. Salads work really well with baby kale which is a little more tender.

Kale is so versatile. It is a great addition to soups like bean or vegetable soup or even chicken and rice soup. It is easy to sauté with a little garlic, vinegar or lemon juice. You can include it in pasta dishes like chicken alfredo or lasagna or add it to a quiche or egg casserole. It stir-fries really well too.

My dad had some Red Russian kale from his container garden that worked just great in the quick sauteed recipe below. Pork chops are seasoned with lemon pepper and cooked in a skillet and removed when done. Then the kale is added to the pan along with a lemony, garlicky sauce that is delicious with both the pork and the kale. Quick and easy, this makes a really good weeknight dinner with some bread on the side. You can use whatever type of kale you have or can find. Just cook until wilted down to your desired texture. The fresh lemon complements the slightly bitter taste of the kale. Cooking the meat in the pan first allows you to scrape up all of the darkened bits into the sauce, adding even more flavor. I used thin cut, boneless chops but you can use whatever type of chops you like or you can substitute chicken or even lamb chops.

Watch for spring greens and add them to your family’s meals this month for quick and easy dinners. For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at bedford.tennessee.edu.

Lemon Pepper Pork Chops with Kale

4 thin cut, boneless pork chops
lemon pepper seasoning
kosher salt
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon honey
4 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
6 cups stemmed and roughly torn kale
2 green onions, sliced

Sprinkle the pork chops with lemon pepper seasoning and kosher salt on both sides. In a medium to large skillet, heat the vegetable oil over high heat. Add the pork chops and reduce heat just slightly. Cook undisturbed for 3 minutes. Turn and cook another 3 minutes or until cooked through. Remove to a plate to rest. Meanwhile, combine lemon juice, honey, garlic and pepper in a small bowl. When the pork comes out of the pan, add the kale, green onions and sauce mixture. Cook for a minute or two until the kale is wilted. Remove kale with a slotted spoon to a serving platter with a rim. Reduce sauce over high heat for a minute or two and then pour over kale and top with pork. Serves 2.