

How can you not Love Spinach... Seriously

by John Rizzo

With a spring as wet and cold as we just had, it's hard to believe that local produce is just around the bend from harvest. One of the very first vegetables we'll see is fresh spinach. Although most of us are probably not growing our own, we can still sit back and enjoy its crisp sweet leaves of spring.

While at the market, look for spinach with rich green leaves and no yellow blemishes. Fresh spinach should be crisp and firm with no signs of wilt. Do not clean it until you are ready to use it; the water will hasten spoilage. Store it in an airtight plastic bag in your refrigerator for up to one week.

This nutrient dense vegetable provides an incredible dose of beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A. This wondrous vitamin is essential for vision and the prevention of night blindness, supports bone formation and strength, helps maintain healthy hair and skin, prevents and fights viral and respiratory infections, along with many other beneficial traits.

Additionally, spinach is a great source of Vitamin K, which helps control blood clotting, a good source of folic acid, which is an anti-anemia vitamin and a moderate source of Vitamin C and Vitamin E. Spinach is one of the very best plant sources of iron as well.

Fresh or frozen, spinach can be added to many dishes without negatively altering the flavor. Add fresh leaves to your salad, wilt them in a skillet and serve under your favorite chicken or fish dish, or add some to your lasagna or other favorite ricotta recipes.

One last thing, did you know that spinach growers credited Popeye with a 33 percent increase in U.S. spinach consumption in the 1930's — almost single handedly saving the spinach industry?

Chicken Florentine

Yield: 6

Chicken breasts, boneless, skinless	6	Black pepper	1/4 tsp.
Ricotta cheese	3/4 Cup	Paprika	1/2 tsp.
Parmesan Cheese, grated	2 TBL	Chicken broth	2 Cups
Spinach, fresh	3/4 Cup	Flour	2 TBL
		Olive Oil	1 TBL

Flatten the chicken breasts to about 1/4 inch and set aside.

Remove the stems from the spinach; wash the leaves thoroughly and pat dry. In a small skillet, heat the olive oil and cook the spinach until it begins to soften and wilt; remove from heat and cut into half inch pieces.

In a small mixing bowl, combine the ricotta and parmesan cheeses, spinach and black pepper. Lay the chicken out on a clean counter and spread about 3 TBL of the ricotta mixture across each breast. Roll the breast from end to end and set in a baking dish seam side down. Lightly oil and paprika the tops and bake at 350° F for about 20 minutes until the breasts are firm. Remove the breasts and add the chicken broth to the pan; place on low heat on the stove. Scrape all the drippings from the pan and let simmer for about 5 minutes. Mix the flour with enough water to make a slurry and whisk it into the broth. Let the mixture simmer for an additional 5 minutes and shut off the heat. Gently place the chicken back into the pan with the sauce. Cover with foil and return to the oven for 30 minutes or until they reach an internal temperature of 165° F. Remove the chicken from the sauce and let set for about 5 minutes. Slice the chicken to form pinwheel like slices and attractively arrange on a platter. Serve the sauce on the side.