

Don't Forget Bok Choy in your Stir Fry

by John Rizzo

While working at a club many years ago, I was first introduced to bok choy. Because of its light stalks, my immediate thought was that it used in soups and salads, similar to celery. Although it indeed can be used in soups and salads, it is not at all similar to celery. As part of the brassica family, it shares qualities with other members of the group such as cabbage, brussel sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower, and kale to name a few.

As you would expect from any green leafy vegetable, bok choy is a powerhouse of nutrients. It's incredibly rich in vitamins A, C, and K and contains anti-oxidants that can help reduce LDL (bad cholesterol) and protect against breast, colon and prostate cancers. What you may not have expected is this vegetable's extraordinary ability to provide calcium. The calcium is more absorbable because of the low presence of oxalates. Oxalates tend to bind up calcium, making it difficult to absorb. Up to 54% of the calcium in bok choy is absorbable. To put this in perspective, only 32% of the calcium in milk is absorbable. I am not in any way suggesting that bok choy take the place of milk in your diet, but if you have intolerances to dairy products, brassica family vegetables are a natural alternative.

Although this is not scientifically proven, bok choy is considered a "zero calorie" food which states that the food product actually uses more energy to chew and digest than the amount of calories absorbed. But what you can take from this is that you can eat large quantities of bok choy without worrying about weight gain; provided it's not heavily coated with butter or oil.

At the grocery store, select bok choy with white, unblemished stocks and dark green leaves that show no sign of wilting. Store it in open or perforated plastic bag in a high humidity crisper. Good quality bok choy should last up to a week in the refrigerator.

Bok Choy can be used in soups, salads, and stir fries, as well as a condiment on a sandwich or burger.

Stir fried vegetables with Asian Sauce

Yield: 6 servings

Bok Choy	1 Head	Chicken Stock	1 Cup
Zucchini	1 Med	Soy Sauce	4 TBL
Red Pepper	1 Med	Brown Sugar	1½ TBL
Vegetable Oil	1 TBL	Cider or White Vinegar	1 tsp.
Onion, Sliced	1 Med	Cornstarch	1½ TBL
Broccoli or Cauliflower Flowerets	2 Cups	Red Pepper Flakes or Chili Paste	To Taste
Garlic	1 TBL	Sesame Oil	½ tsp.

To prepare the bok choy:

Cut about 1 inch off of the root of the vegetable and discard. Separate the stocks. Trim any blemished leaves and rinse well. Cut the stocks on the bias about ½ inch thick, then slice the soft leaves into 1 inch strips. Keep the leaves separate from the stalks.

Wash the remaining vegetables. Split the zucchini down the middle and cut the halves on the bias into ¼ inch slices. Cut the red peppers into small julienne strips about ¼ inch wide and 2 inches long.

Heat the oil in a large skillet or wok, add the onions and cook until they begin to soften. Add the sliced bok choy stocks and the broccoli and/or cauliflower flowerets; cook until the vegetables are slightly tender on the outside but still firm in the middle; add the red pepper and garlic; cook for an additional minute or so then add the zucchini. Continue to cook the vegetable until they reach the desired texture; add the chicken stock, soy sauce and sugar; bring to a light simmer.

Meanwhile, dissolve the cornstarch in a small amount of water and rub the mixture with your fingers until it is completely dissolved. While continuously stirring, slowly add the cornstarch to the simmering liquid. Let the sauce simmer for about 3 minutes then add the vinegar, sesame oil, and optional pepper flakes or chili paste. Mix well and serve with steamed rice.

