What are Microgreens?

Microgreens are young vegetables similar to sprouts and baby greens. While sprouts have a growing cycle of 2-7 days and don't have any leaves, microgreens grow within 7-21 days and do have leaves. In fact, a microgreen can be harvested once its first leaves begin to emerge.

"Microgreens are an innovative category of vegetables harvested as tender immature greens," Francesco Di Gioia, Ph. D., assistant professor of Vegetable Crop Science at the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, tells SELF. These teeny-tiny greens are the seedlings produced by sprouting the seeds of plants like vegetables, herbs, and some pseudograins (like amaranth and buckwheat), including wild edible species.

Somewhere between a sprout and a baby veggie, microgreens are essentially the same plant you'd buy at the grocery store (like a veggie or herb), at a *much* earlier stage of growth, Tyler Matchett, cofounder of Splash of Greens, an urban microgreens farm in New Brunswick, Canada, tells SELF. "If left to grow, they would become a full-grown vegetable," Matchett explains. But microgreens are typically harvested just one or two weeks after germination—and up to four weeks, Di Gioia says, depending on the species—when the plant is just one to three inches tall. You snip off the portion of the seedling above the root, which includes the cotyledon (the initial leaf that sprouts out of the seed embryo), the stem, and the first "true leaves" of the plant. Bam, you've got a microgreen.

"Microgreens are also called 'vegetable confetti' because they are tiny, beautiful greens characterized by a variety of colors and shapes, as well as by very different and intense, sometimes surprising, flavors," Di Gioia says. There are hundreds of different varieties of microgreens. Pea, sunflower, broccoli, and radish microgreens are some of the most popular varieties among Matchett's customers. Other varieties include beets, Swiss chard, cucumber, sweet pea, endive, savoy, Brussels sprouts, mustards, cauliflower, tatsoi, spinach, kohlrabi, mint, basil, sorrel, cauliflower, arugula, collard, fenugreek, carrot, mizuna, corn, turnip, chervil, celery, scallions, and komatsuna.

What are the Health Benefits of Microgreens?

Microgreens may be small, but they are packed with nutrients! They are rich in potassium, iron, zinc, magnesium and copper and full of antioxidants.

In fact, microgreens are actually more nutritious than their full-size counterparts. In one study, researchers found that microgreens like red cabbage, broccoli, and radish contain up to 40 times higher levels of vital nutrients than their mature counterparts.

Tiny greens, big benefits

Go big or go home? With greens there's no need. "Microgreens are essentially vegetables and herbs that haven't hit puberty yet," explains registered dietitian Leah Silberman, RDN, founder of Tovita Nutrition. "They're the teeny-tiny versions of your favorite veggies like broccoli, kale, arugula, cabbage, watercress, kohrabi, which are harvested after just seven to 14 days, when the first little shoots sprout," she says.

These tiny leaves used to simply garnish plates, but these greens got a boost from their C-list status after a 2012 study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* found that they contained crazy amounts of nutrients and antioxidants compared to their full-grown versions. That means these tiny little baby leaves can potentially provide people with large amounts of nutrients like vitamin C and vitamin E, and antioxidants like beta carotene, according to lead researcher Gene Lester.

Microgreens are loaded with nutritious value which is capable of fighting off diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and possibly cancer. Microgreens also support healthy aging, promote digestive health, enhance brain function, good for respiratory system, anti-inflammatory, very good for hair, skin and nails, and an overall sense of well-being. Microgreens are a superfood that should be included in the diet of all humanity as a way to enhance vitality and be truly nourished at a deep cellular level.

Enjoy!