

Your guide to leafy greens

The most nutritious leafy greens available in the UK, ranked by nutrient density.

I share this list of leafy greens with all my clients, ranked by how nutrient-dense they are. These are some of the most powerful, affordable foods available to you, and research suggests the natural compounds they contain - including dietary nitrates - may help your blood vessels relax and support healthy blood pressure. If you haven't already, you can watch the full video on this in my Pills Don't Teach Skills series.

What the score out of 100 means

Each food below is scored using the Powerhouse Fruit and Vegetable Index, a peer-reviewed scoring system published by the CDC. It measures how many nutrients a food provides relative to its calories - the higher the score, the more nutritional value you get per mouthful. Scores are capped at 100, the highest possible score on this scale.

Read the original research: cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2014/13_0390.htm

The list

LEAFY GREEN	SCORE /100	WHY IT MADE THE LIST
Watercress	100	The single highest-scoring vegetable on this index. Peppery, easy to add to sandwiches and salads, widely available in UK supermarkets.
Chinese cabbage	92	Mild, slightly sweet. Excellent stir-fried, steamed or shredded raw into slaws.
Swiss chard	89	Colourful stems, earthy leaves. Sauté with garlic, or add to soups and stews.
Beet greens	87	The leafy tops of beetroots - don't throw them away. Sauté just like spinach.
Spinach	86	Hugely versatile - raw in salads and smoothies, or wilted into pasta, eggs and curries.
Leaf lettuce	71	Soft, loose-leaf varieties (not iceberg) - a good everyday salad base with real nutritional value.
Romaine lettuce	63	Crunchy and mild. Far more nutritious than iceberg, and an easy everyday swap.
Collard greens	62	Hearty and slightly bitter. Slow-cook with a little stock, or shred finely into soups.
Kale	49	Robust and hearty. Massage with a little oil to soften before eating raw, or roast into crisps.
Rocket (arugula)	38	Peppery and quick to wilt. Adds a flavour lift to any salad or on top of a pizza.

How to use leafy greens

1

Add a large handful every day

Start with the food you'll actually enjoy and reach for again - spinach in a smoothie, rocket on a sandwich, watercress in a soup. Consistency matters far more than picking the single highest scorer.

2

Rotate through a few different ones

Different greens offer slightly different nutrients. Aim to work through 3-4 from this list across a typical week rather than relying on just one.

3

Cooking is absolutely fine

Lightly steaming, sautéing or wilting greens makes very little difference to most of their nutrient value, and may make some nutrients easier for your body to absorb. Don't let 'must eat it raw' put you off.

Important

Leafy greens contain vitamin K, which can interact with warfarin. If you take warfarin, please speak to your GP or anticoagulation clinic before significantly increasing your intake of leafy greens, so your dose can be monitored appropriately. This does not mean you need to avoid them - just keep your intake consistent and let your care team know.

MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

This content is for general health information only and does not constitute personal medical advice. The information reflects population-level lifestyle medicine research and the CDC Powerhouse Fruit and Vegetable Index. Please consult your GP or a qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your diet, exercise or health routine.

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