



Home Food Safety™

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Washing Leafy Greens

by Jackie Newgent, registered dietitian nutritionist

From arugula to watercress, leafy greens are fresh, beautiful, tasty and healthful. They're popular, too.

Over the past several decades, salads have gone from simple bowls of iceberg lettuce to glorious culinary spectacles in the center of the plate. Greens like spinach and kale were once primarily served steamed or sautéed as sides, but are now found in cooked and raw preparations, from smoothies to desserts. There's one golden rule that applies to any leafy greens: Between purchasing and plating, washing them properly is key to food safety!



Leafy greens need to be handled safely just like any other food. And some [foodborne outbreak-related illnesses](#) have been related to fresh leafy greens.

Top Tips for Washing Leafy Greens

The first step in preparation of fresh greens, whether produced organically or conventionally, purchased from a farmer's market or supermarket, served cooked or raw, is to wash them properly.

Here's how:

- Always start with clean hands. [Wash your hands](#) for 20 seconds or more with soap and warm water.
- Cut away any damaged areas on leaves or stems before preparing or eating the greens. If something seems rotten, discard it.
- If leafy greens *are not* labeled as "pre-washed" or "ready-to-eat," thoroughly wash them under running water *just before* chopping, cooking or eating. This will help reduce the presence of microorganisms. **Hint:** If you wash leafy greens before storing, you can potentially promote bacterial growth and enhance spoilage.
- If lettuce has a core, such as iceberg lettuce, remove it before washing.
- When you have loose leaves, such as mesclun, that can't easily be held under cold running water, immerse the leaves in a large clean bowl or a salad spinner filled with cold water. Toss them around in the water for 30 seconds or more. Drain and repeat twice.
- Never wash leafy greens with soap, detergent or bleach, since these can leave residues that are not meant to be consumed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration doesn't recommend using commercial produce washes because these may also leave residues.
- If leafy greens *are* labeled as "pre-washed" or "ready-to-eat," use them without additional washing, since it is unlikely to enhance their safety.
- After washing fresh greens, pat them dry with paper towels or a freshly clean kitchen towel -- or use a salad spinner -- to help remove excess liquid.

Jackie Newgent, RDN, CDN, is a Brooklyn-based culinary nutritionist, writer, and media personality. She's author of several cookbooks, including The With or Without Meat Cookbook, and blogs at Tasteovers by Jackie.

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