

Great plants to grow for delicious salads

There is such a vast variety of easy to grow plants, rich in chlorophyll, vitamins, minerals and protein that can create eye-catching, nutritious salads. **Salads served daily are valuable to our well-being**, particularly in warm weather when the body craves for something cool and refreshing. Salads can consist of leaves, vegetables, flowers and fruit, seeds and nuts, herbs, spices, cheese, pickled tidbits, drizzled with tantalising dressing, a true treasure-trove of wonderful flavours and a gold mine of health-giving nutrients.

Plants are so very special and play a very valuable role in our lives. In fact, all food on our table is made possible by plants, whether it is a loaf of bread, piece of steak, eggs, ice cream and sugar. We can't live without food. We can't live without plants. Plants capture sunlight and energy through photosynthesis and together with chlorophyll (the green stuff in plants) produce plant foods, rich in vitamins, minerals, enzymes and proteins, that gives us our daily food, besides many other processes in the body to keep its amazing mechanism functioning like: cell building, and removal of wastes and toxins. Chlorophyll-rich plants are also valued for helping build strong bones.

Chlorophyll, the green pigment, is important to plants, and in fact can be regarded as the 'green blood' of plants, supplying nutrients to plant cells. Interestingly, chlorophyll is very similar in chemical composition to human blood, with the chlorophyll molecule closely resembling the hemin molecule of our blood. The only difference in these molecules is that chlorophyll contains magnesium as its central atom, while haemoglobin of blood contains iron in the correlating position. Chlorophyll acts as a catalyst in systemising the various elements associated with plant growth and it also acts as a catalyst to promote healing within the bodies of man and animals. Considerable research has been done, which shows chlorophyll to be a tremendous blood building element; and to actually rejuvenate old cells, promote growth of new cells, provide a favourable intestinal flora and aid regular bowel elimination and benefit the circulation; plus pain relieving properties, antiseptic and antioxidant action, oxygen producing benefits, and energy boosting. Think of chlorophyll as a mighty weapon that you can add to your diet, for maintaining or restoring health. Many remedial effects of chlorophyll have been recorded: builds a high blood count, helps eliminate anaemic conditions, bad breath and body odour, haemorrhoids, catarrh and nasal drip, varicose veins, inflammatory conditions and ulcers, and helps counteract toxins.

Research has shown chlorophyll is a valuable aid to prevent and to treat many diseases. Chlorophyll-rich plants have featured in cancer treatments, as they help detoxify the liver. A diet, rich in greens, has been used to help lower cholesterol and triglycerides, regulate blood sugar, relieve heartburn, ease chronic muscle pain, reduce food cravings, and increase strength and stamina. American herbal writer and lecturer, Dr. Bernard Jensen valued greens for good health. He said, "When you are green inside, you are clean inside". Green inside, can result from a daily regime of raw salad eating ... salads with plenty of fresh, green leafy chlorophyll-rich plants. Numerous studies have shown, that fresh greens boost lymphocyte production and so increase resistance to illness, and strengthen the immune system.

Salad greens are rich in *vitamin C* and *beta-carotene*, which makes them heart-friendly, with both working together to prevent the oxidation of cholesterol. When cholesterol becomes oxidised, it becomes sticky and starts to build up in the artery walls forming plaques. If the plaques become too large, they can block off blood flow or break, causing a clot that may trigger a heart attack or stroke. Maximise the benefits of salad for the *B vitamins*, including

folic acid. Recent research at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research has found that the consumption of green leafy vegetables have a range of constituents (eg zeaxanthin, lutein and other components) which help boost the skin's natural defence against damage caused by UV rays. Dr. Jolieke van der Pols said, "This new evidence suggests that an increase in consumption of greens may help to reduce the risk of skin cancer recurring among those with a previous history, by up to 55%." We all need to protect ourselves from skin cancer. Greens are also a good source of *calcium*, essential to bone formation, and nerves, glands, muscles and heart health; and *iron*, important to blood building, oxygen to cells, stamina and energy; and also the mineral *potassium*, which has been shown in studies to be useful in lowering high blood pressure ... another factor for heart health.

Salads picked fresh from the garden, or from a few pots near the kitchen door (if no garden is available) is the absolute freshest and most nutritious food, to serve for a meal, and teeming with *living enzymes*, so essential to health. Enzymes have been called 'the spark plug of life' as they initiate so many bio-chemical processes in the body. Greens are rich in digestive enzymes... these make it easier to digest the heavier foods we eat, such as starches and proteins. Enzymes convert food to energy, essential to fuel every biologic mechanism, and regulate metabolism on a cellular level. *Leaves are also an excellent source of fibre*, which helps to maintain regular soft stools and a healthy colon. Lack of fibre (usually due to a diet of processed foods) causes constipation, a toxic colon and other diseases.

Salad plants are alkaline, and alkaline foods are fundamental to good health. Pain and disease in the body is caused by a build up of toxins around the cells, which creates an acid state (opposite to alkaline). A variety of

alkaline foods can assist the body to clear acid wastes. When our body is very acidic, we are not able to absorb minerals and other nutrients from the food we eat; and the body is not able to so easily repair damaged cells, detoxify heavy metals or other toxins, we are more susceptible to fatigue and illness, and tumour cells can thrive. Many natural health practitioners recommend a ratio of 80% alkaline foods and 20% acid foods in the daily diet. Alkaline foods are also known for their healing properties. **Our cells love alkaline foods.**

By tossing together a variety of greens, fresh herbs for flavouring, and colourful vegetables we can create a wonderful meal with a range of phyto-nutrients, many of them are powerful antioxidants, that act to destroy free radicals and toxins in the body and can halt cell mutations. **Think of salads as a 'treat to well-being'**. Think of salads as a 'boost to better health'. Call salad leaves '**green magic**' and this is a good way of encouraging children to eat a salad ... saying ... 'when we eat a salad, it can work like magic in the body, to make toxins disappear and keep our body healthy'. Add to your garden, or grow in pots, some of the following plants:

Lebanese Cress (*Aethionema corditloun*) perennial 30cm; with lush attractive fern-like leaves and a carrot-like flavour; wonderful in tossed salads, as a garnish, or made into pesto with basil or other herbs.

Sweet Leaf Bush (*Sauropus androgynus*) perennial 1-2meters; tastes like fresh peas; leaves are over 34% protein and excellent source of calcium, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus and iron. Eat leaves as a snack any time, add to stir-fries. Indonesian folk-lore, says ... to stop teeth grinding or snoring in sleep, eat sweet leaf!

Salad Mallow (*Corchorus olitorius*) annual 1m meter; over 20% protein, rich in Vitamin A, B1, B2, BC, C, exceptionally high potassium (3068mg per 100g) making it perhaps the

richest plant source of potassium that we can grow (potassium aids blood and oxygen circulation, is essential to digestion, function of heart and muscles, and for energy). Mucin in leaves is valuable for clearing mucus and toxins from the body. Eat raw and cooked, or dry the leaves and store for protein source to add to other meals, and as survival food.

Drumstick Tree (*Moringa oleifera*) this tree can be kept trimmed to bush size; leaves 38% protein, with all essential amino acids. High calcium (297mg per 100g leaves); vitamins A (8855 IU per 100g leaves) B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B15, B17, C, D, K. Leaves have strong antibiotic, antifungal, anti-fatigue, antioxidant and tonic properties.

Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) ground sprawler to 60cm high; leaves and the bright coloured flowers have antibiotic, antioxidant and tonic properties; use in salads, sandwiches and as a garnish.

Sheep Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) perennial groundcover, powerful antioxidant properties of leaves said to kill viruses; eat leaves at the beginning of a meal as they have a mild sour flavour which helps stimulate the digestive juices in the mouth, and the sour flavour can benefit the kidneys, bladder, and the circulation.

Ceylon Salad Leaves (*Basella alba* and *B. rubra*) perennial (annual in cold climates) fast growing climber or ground cover; nip off nutritious leaves (eat raw and cooked) they have many health-giving and healing benefits.

Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) annual ground cover; young leaves extremely rich in vitamin C and Essential Fatty Acids, therefore valuable to use regularly. EFA nourish the body at the very foundation of health, the cellular level. EFA strengthen cell membranes to fortify against the invasion of harmful micro-organisms. EFA also help dissolve body fat, increase metabolism and energy production, reduce cravings for sweet and fatty foods and are required for a healthy nervous and immune system. And in the same family... **Leaf Ginseng** (*Talinum triangulare*) perennial 60cm; add leaves to salads and stir-fries etc. In South East Asia the tonic properties of this plant are as highly esteemed as ginseng. Also belonging to the portulaca family are **Sun Jewels** (*Portulaca grandiflora*) an annual ground cover; add leaves and the bright coloured flowers to salads and use as a garnish.

Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) perennial to 20cm, will grow in well-limed soil in pots. Leaves rich in Vitamin A, B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B17, C, D, E, K, and in minerals, calcium, potassium, iron, zinc, sulphur and germanium; leaves valued for purifying the blood and toning the whole system. And when you have excess watercress, try a **Watercress Sauce**: Blend in a blender, or chop very finely, a large handful of watercress, ½ cup yoghurt or kefir, 1 tablesp. lemon juice, 1 teasp. mustard paste, dash of salt and pepper, 1 tablesp. fresh chives and dill. Serve over diced cucumber, other vegetables or over a tossed salad.

Rocket (*Eruca veriscaria sativa*) annual 60cm -100cm; use tasty leaves in salads, pesto, soups and as a garnish.

Mukunu-wenna (*Alternanthera triandra*) and **Purple Mukunu-wenna** (*A. versicolor*) perennial ground cover plants, and **Sambu Lettuce** (*A. sissoo*) a bush species to 60cm; provide nutritious leaves for salads and cooked dishes. These plants are highly esteemed in Sri Lanka and India and other Asian countries for eye ailments, and strengthening the eyes and the nervous system. The vitamin and mineral-rich leaves have been an essential

ingredient in *kola kanda*, a traditional dish, consumed daily, made with boiled rice, coconut and several kinds of green leaves, finely chopped. Eaten as a meal, kola kanda is esteemed for cooling the body, as a tonic, and for promoting energy and balance.

Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) 1m hardy bush, glossy green leaves, eye-catching lavender flowers; leaves eaten and flowers too, which are slightly sweet, cool, and jelly-like, indicating the presence of mucin, valuable for cleansing, soothing and healing. The plant is a valuable expectorant for soothing irritated tissues in the throat and chest.

Mushroom Plant (*Rungia klossii*) perennial 60cm; glossy dark green leaves rich in calcium (272mg per 100 g leaves), and leaves are higher protein than mushrooms; use raw or cooked to add a mushroom flavour to dishes.

Chinese Watercress also called Kang kong (*Ipomea aquatica*) perennial 60cm (annual in cold climates); leaves 31% protein; rich in vitamin A (6300 I.U. per 100g leaves), B1, B2, B5, C; use leaves raw and cooked.

Queensland Greens (*Hibiscus manihot*) perennial 2m; leaves 29% protein and rich in vitamins A, B, C, calcium, magnesium, iron, also mucin. Use in salads, steamed, quiche; and the large leaves are used as wraps.

Amaranth (there are many *Amaranthus* species) annuals 60cm – 100cm tall; young leaves in salads and mature leaves in cooked dishes. Seeds sprouted, added to baking, made into bread; seeds popped like popcorn.

Warrigal Greens (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*) annual/biennial, use young leaves raw and cooked; great in quiche.

Mustard Greens, pak choi, tatsoi, kale, mizuna, cress, broccoli, horseradish, wasabi and other plants in the Brassicaceae family, provide flavour, antioxidants and nutrient-rich leaves.

Celery, celeriac, dill, fennel, parsley, mitsuba, chervil, lovage, coriander, gotu kola and arracacha - all members of the Apiaceae family (formerly called Umbelliferae) are useful greens to add to salads.

Often plants of the Asteraceae family (formerly called Compositae) are added to mesclun salad mixes, and some of the easiest to grow for salad are **dandelion, endive, chicory and open-headed, loose-leaf, lettuce types** like: oak leaf, royal oak, rabbit ear, cos verdi, darwin and everlasting. **Mesclun** means a variety of very young tender, baby-green leaves of a variety of edible greens, picked 2-5 weeks after germination.

Other leaves like **silver beet, salad burnet, alehoof, orach, borage, spinach, comfrey, brahmi, brooklime and red clover**, can add extra variety to a salad. **Alfalfa** leaves are renowned for their alkalising action and for nourishing the digestive, glandular, urinary and skeletal systems. And don't forget **edible weeds** in your garden like young leaves of **plantain, shepherds purse, cobbler's pegs, fat hen** and **chickweed** (make sure it is *Stelaria media*, not the tropical chickweed). Weeds are rich in nutrients, antioxidants and healing properties. Cobbler's pegs have been noted for 95 therapeutic uses.

And **flavouring a tossed salad with herbs, gives us even more nutrients, antibiotics, antioxidants and health-promoting properties.** Grow a variety of herbs and use them daily; experiment - try any of the following to give a variety of tantalising aromas and tastes: **rau om** (one of my favourite,) **dill, kaffir lime leaves finely cut, caraway seeds, garlic, chives, chillies, basil, marjoram, tade, oregano, mint, thyme, savory, sweet tarragon, coriander, papalo, betel leaf, vap ca, lemon balm,** and a little finely grated **ginger.** There are so many benefits in using herbs in foods. The aroma, essences or essential oils in herbs, represent the life force and energy of plants. Using herbs is a gentle way of stimulating the body's self-healing process. Delicious herbal aromas can induce a deep relaxed breathing that can help relieve nervous tension, stress and pain. In herbal history, the Chinese looked upon the nose as the chief organ of absorption of Qi or vital energy, for sustaining life. So, let's use fresh herbs regularly for their wonderful aromas and thus encourage a deeper more relaxed breathing rate, to enhance our daily lives. Adding fresh herbs will mean we can eat more naturally, without excess salt, as the herbs will stimulate the taste bud receptors and heighten the flavours in the salad.

And if you wish to make a salad into a complete meal, toss in for colour, texture and added nutrients: diced or grated carrots, beetroot, radish, corn, snow peas, asparagus, pineapple, capsicum, tomatoes, avocado, cauliflower, cabbage, cucumber, pickled gherkins, tomato, apple, pineapple, orange, onion, zucchini, Chinese artichokes and Jerusalem artichokes, mushrooms, and **sprouts** (like fenugreek, mung, alfalfa, lentils, adzuki, sunflower, buck wheat); and if desired: hard-boiled egg, diced cheese, and cooked chicken or other meats.

If you like a mayonnaise, toss the salad with a tantalising dressing which could be a simple mix of olive oil, apple cider vinegar, lemon juice and a little honey if desired; or the mayonnaise could be accentuated with mustard, garlic, horseradish or curry powder. The dressing could utilise yoghurt or kefir as a base, plus garlic or other herbs. Then add a sprinkling of any of the following **seeds and nuts:** sesame, pepitas, chia, caraway, almonds, walnuts, coconut, pecans, linseed, dill, and hulled sunflower seeds. Dried fruit can create another salad variation, try sultanas or raisins. And for a finishing touch to your wonderful salad, decorate the top with petite, edible flowers from the garden. **Garnish with flowers** like heartsease, nasturtiums, thyme, violets, chives, elderberry, mullein, society garlic, fennel, sweet tarragon, mallow, chervil and calendula petals. Herb flowers look great and make a wonderful conversation piece. Now ... serve and enjoy!

When we create a tossed salad with a variety of leaves, herbs, seeds, vegetables and fruits, we can combine a complete spectrum of colours: red, yellow/orange, green, purple/blue, white, and the flavours: of sweet, sour, pungent, salty and bitter ... to help build balance in the body.

Fresh green leaves and herbs can be utilised in many ways, and in every meal of the day. I start my day with fresh picked herbs on a **breakfast** of homemade muesli, topped with fruits in season, sprouts, and chopped leaves of gotu kola, herb robert, brahmi, sweet leaf, lemon balm, rau om, sheep sorrel, purslane and any other herbs that I wish to add, topped with kefir. Kefir is a beneficial bacteria and enzymes with probiotic and antibiotic action, made from a culture grown with milk, whey or seed milk. The word kefir means *well-being*, and it can do this with many functions ... by helping to alkalise the mouth, stimulate the flow of saliva, increase digestive juices in the intestinal tract, as well as activating peristaltic action of the bowel. Fresh greens and herbs can be generously topped on bread or sandwiches for **lunch.** Even a hot cooked **evening meal,** can have a dollop of chopped fresh leaves, or a side

salad ... **and remind yourself ... that the raw food ... will be the most nutrient-rich part on the plate.**

Green smoothies, using chlorophyll-rich leaves like salad mallow, comfrey, nettle, stevia, alfalfa, sweet leaf ... blended with fresh pineapple, orange or apple juice make a quick, delicious and refreshing drink.

For a flavour treat, try **pesto with herbs and lots of green leaves**. Although pesto is considered to be of Italian origin (using sweet basil, olive oil, pine nuts, garlic and cheese), we can now enjoy this traditional mixture, using a variety of leaves and herbs, in a variety of ways, on foods. Pesto means *pounded* and it was traditionally made by pounding the leaves with a pestle, in a marble mortar, using lots of steady, repeated, pounding, hand action. With kitchen 'mod-cons' we can prepare pesto very quickly in an electric blender. The pesto consistency can be a thick paste and spreadable, or thin and runny like a sauce, depending on the way it is to be used... as an appetiser, or on a meal. A thick pesto is so tasty on bread, cracker biscuits, or I like to serve it with a plate of small-sized Ceylon salad leaves (just use the leaves for scooping some of the pesto). Pesto made to a runnier consistency like a sauce, can be tossed through pasta, spread on a pizza base, used as a salad dressing or drizzled over steamed vegetables. Pesto can dress up a simple meal and make it into an elegant meal, grand enough to place before royalty ... of course, you being the royalty ... **as you wish to give your body the best... supreme food in flavour and nutrients**. Pesto can be made from a variety of herbs and green leaves, oil, nuts and cheese. There is nothing complicated in the process of making herb pastes or pesto ... just look at what plants are thriving in your garden that have lots of leaves to share with you, and use your creative imagination. When using herbs that do not provide a lot of green bulk, as with thyme for example, a '*green extender*' can add volume to the mixture (try purslane, Lebanese cress, watercress, salad mallow, sheep sorrel and French sorrel, parsley, spinach, silver beet, mallow, drumstick and sweet leaf bush leaves).

The choice of the right oil is important in pesto, with olive oil considered important for flavour and viscosity, although a variety of other seed, cold pressed oils could be used. A virgin olive oil, defined as second-press oil, can provide sufficient quality, as the strong flavour of the pesto overpowers the fruity extra virgin olive oil; although it will certainly make a very fine pesto. To make classic pesto, use the following ratios, pounded with mortar and pestle or blend in a food processor: use 4 parts (by volume) fresh basil or other herbs, 1 part oil, 1 part nuts (I use sunflower kernels as they are economical), ½ part grated cheese and 1 teaspoon of salt. Process as smooth or as chunky as you wish. For a runnier pesto, use more oil. Pack the pesto into a container and cover with a thin layer of olive oil and cap tightly. Pesto is such a flavour treat, and will keep several weeks when refrigerated, or it can be frozen for later use. There may be some discolouration of the pesto on the surface, but it will not affect the flavour. Simply, stir the discoloured pesto into the green pesto below, add a layer of oil and refrigerate again.

A great recipe for using greens is in a baked dish called **Incredible Quiche**: Beat 3 eggs, add 1½ cups milk, ½ cup wholemeal flour, 1 teasp. salt, garlic and onions as desired, and season with herbs. Add 3-4 large handfuls of chopped green leaves. The leaves could be one of any of the following when in plentiful supply, picked fresh from the garden, or a mixture: Ceylon salad leaves, amaranth, sweet leaf, salad mallow, comfrey, Queensland greens, purslane, drumstick tree leaves, rocket, mukunu-wenna, and warrigal greens. Tip into a large oiled oven dish and bake in a moderate oven 20 minutes, or until set. Serve hot or cold, pack for school and work lunches, or freeze for later use. Cheese, mushrooms, bacon, etc, can be added if desired. This recipe is incredibly easy and incredibly popular.

When you grow a variety of salad plants, you can grow them organically and serve them absolutely fresh, full of nutrients and living enzymes, and you will find doing this rewarding activity, will also be a saving to your weekly food budget ... what could be better than that! Plan to prepare a green salad daily. *Salads are low in calories and glycaemic index*, with a most beneficial *glycaemic load* effect, on the body's bio-chemistry. Bio-genic living foods (eg sprouts, and baby greens), and bio-active foods (eg freshly picked greens, vegetables and fruits) offer the strongest support for the regeneration of human cells. Many natural health researchers, emphasise, the importance of these foods, to provide a lifestyle for high-level well-being ... a way of living, that can help prevent premature ageing, illness and fatigue. Salads are so rich in nutrients ... that can provide energy and nourishment throughout your body.

Put some 'green magic' into your life today!

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For more detailed information on the salad greens, herbs, sprouts and edible plants in this article, refer to Isabell's

books 'How can I use herbs in my daily life?' and 'How can I grow and use sprouts as living food?'