

Leafy Mustard: A Nutrient-Packed Superfood for Health and Wellness

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Leafy mustard (*Brassica juncea*, $2n = 36$, AABB), often referred to as mustard greens or simply mustard leaves, is a nutritious vegetable belonging to the Brassicaceae family. It is developed by hybridization between *Brassica rapa* ($2n=20$, AA) X *Brassica nigra* ($2n=16$, BB), followed by chromosome doubling. It is characterized by its purple/red/green leaves with a green/white midrib, known for its thick, tender, and spicy leaves with a unique taste and flavour. It is known for its high resistance to heat, moisture, and cold stress, depending on variety, it is commonly harvested 35 to 40 days after sowing in the summer and 60 to 70 days in the autumn-winter season.

Nutritional Profile

Leafy mustard is a low-calorie, nutrient-dense vegetable. Rich in vitamins and minerals, it offers an abundance of essential nutrients including Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin K, folate, calcium, and iron. The high content of Vitamin A supports eye health and immune function, while Vitamin C acts as a powerful antioxidant, promoting skin health and boosting the immune system. Vitamin K is

crucial for bone health and proper blood clotting.

Moreover, mustard greens are an excellent source of fibre, which aids in digestion and promotes a healthy gut. Their fibre content also contributes to heart health by helping to regulate cholesterol levels. Mustard leaves contain compounds known as glucosinolates, which have been studied for their potential cancer-fighting properties. These phytochemicals play a role in detoxifying the body and reducing the risk of certain chronic diseases, including cancer.

Health Benefits

Boosts Immune System: The high levels of Vitamin C in mustard greens help strengthen the immune system by supporting the production of white blood cells, which fight infections. Regular consumption of mustard greens can enhance the body's ability to combat common colds and other illnesses.

Supports Heart Health: Mustard greens are heart-healthy food, thanks to their high potassium and fibre content. Potassium helps maintain healthy blood pressure levels, while fibre aids in reducing cholesterol, ultimately promoting cardiovascular health.

Improves Digestion: The fibre in leafy mustard enhances digestion and prevents constipation by adding bulk to the stool. It also promotes the growth of healthy gut bacteria, improving overall digestive health.

Anti-Inflammatory Properties: Mustard greens are rich in antioxidants, such as beta-carotene and Vitamin C, which have anti-inflammatory properties. Chronic inflammation has been linked to several diseases, including arthritis and heart disease, so consuming foods like mustard greens may

help reduce inflammation in the body.

Bone Health: Thanks to their high Vitamin K content, mustard greens contribute to stronger bones by promoting calcium absorption and bone mineralization. Vitamin K plays a pivotal role in bone health and may reduce the risk of fractures.



Culinary Uses

Mustard greens can be consumed in various ways, either raw or cooked. When eaten raw, they are often added to salads or sandwiches. Cooking mustard greens softens their texture and balances their bitterness, making them an excellent addition to soups, stews, stir-fries, and curries. In Southern U.S. cuisine, mustard greens are commonly cooked with pork or other meats, creating hearty dishes full of flavour.

Conclusion

Leafy mustard is a versatile, nutrient-packed vegetable that offers a wide range of health benefits. With its rich vitamin and mineral content, along with its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, mustard greens can play a significant role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Whether you incorporate them into salads, soups, or side dishes, mustard greens are an excellent way to boost your overall nutrition. For those looking to improve their health, this humble leafy green is a great addition to any diet.