June’s early summer heat means eating lighter. Not only are hot, heavy meals unappetizing in this weather, but fresh, crisp veggies are finally in season and tasting delicious! The quintessential light, early summer meal is a salad, and that’s why lettuce is the June Food of the Month.

Lettuce, of course, is not one thing. While you may think of the classic iceberg or romaine, lettuce grows in countless varieties. Each one has a different visual appeal, texture and flavor. All are filled with different combinations of vitamins and phytonutrients that help the body prevent chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease.

Eating lighter meals based on low-calorie lettuce might just help you live longer too. Emerging research suggests that eating a calorie-restricted diet while still obtaining all essential nutrients might lead to a longer, healthier life. One more reason to choose the salad.

**Mesclun**

Mesclun is the salad green for the person who likes variety and gets bored easily. Mesclun, otherwise known as spring mix or mixed baby greens, is just that: a mix. Mesclun could be made up of more than 10 varieties of lettuce, including baby spinach, red & green oak leaf, tango and arugula. Even though it’s made up of many different types of lettuce, mesclun usually is grown all together, with seeds sold as a mix. Try this delicious mesclun salad with cucumbers and feta.

**Frisee**

Frisee is the green for the sophisticated foodie. Frisee’s tangled mane of crunchy tendrils is a culinary delight. The French especially love its slightly bitter flavor that pairs well with acidic dressings. When growing frisee, farmers bind the outer leaves around the middle to prevent the inner leaves from seeing sunlight. This is why the inner leaves are lighter and more tender. Try this simple recipe for Frisee salad with mustard vinaigrette.

**Red Leaf**

Red leaf is for the salad lover who has a darker side. Although its purple leaves are anything BUT sad! The color adds not only complex flavor, but also additional healthy phytochemicals that protect against heart disease and cancer. Red leaf is slightly crispy, but not quite as crispy as romaine. It holds up well in salads along side other crunchy vegetables like carrots, bell peppers, and cucumbers. Try this red leaf, pear, and almond salad recipe.

**Butter Lettuce**

Butter lettuce is for the silky smooth, sensitive type. It’s mild flavor and buttery texture makes eating a salad an almost sensual experience. It still has some crispness, and its small head assures that you’ll use it up before it wilts or goes bad. Use as a salad on it’s own with your favorite vinaigrette, or try these butter lettuce chicken wraps.

**Kale**
The health nut, fitness guru will tell you his favorite salad green is kale. Kale has been having a moment for years now, so much that it's now the butt of some health food jokes. But kale's nutrition bona fides are nothing to laugh at, with one cup giving you more than a day's worth of Vitamins A & C, as well as a healthy dose of the antioxidants called glucosinolates. Many people are surprised they like kale raw in salads, but you can also try cooking it to relax the flavor a bit. Try this recipe for slow cooked Tuscan kale.

Radicchio

The salad lover who is passionate and craves a good crunch will go for radicchio. An Italian lettuce variety, it boasts a bold, bitter taste that will spice up any salad. This strong flavor is due to one of its antioxidants, lactucopicrin, which, alongside its carotenoids and flavonoids, makes radicchio super healthy. If you can't take the heat, try it grilled to mellow the flavor. This recipe for perfectly grilled radicchio is sure to be a hit.

Spinach

Spinach is for eaters who enjoy a good book more than a party. Quiet, humble spinach has recently been over shadowed by other super greens, but it continues to be one of the healthiest greens available. It's high in antioxidant carotenoids and glycoglycerolipids, which new evidence suggests is good for reducing inflammation in the gut and may prevent cancer. One of the most magical things in the world is putting an impossibly large amount of spinach in a pan and it wilts down to almost nothing! Try a new twist on pesto with this spinach walnut pesto — put it on salmon or whole wheat pasta for a power-dinner!

References


Brandhorst et al., A periodic diet that mimics fasting promotes multi-system regeneration, enhanced cognitive performance, and healthspan. Cell Metabolism. 2015 http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cmet.2015.05.02


Featured image of mixed salad greens by Suzie's Farm via Flickr.

TAGS: LETTUCE GREENS, SALAD GREENS, TYPES OF LETTUCE
You know you should eat greens. But some greens pack a stronger nutritional punch than others. STACK helps you sort it all out.
Though green leaf lettuce might edge out romaine lettuce in terms of overall nutrition, romaine lettuce is no slouch. It's also one of the most popular greens included in the rinsed, ready-to-eat salad packages you find in your local supermarket. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, "the darker the leaves, the more nutrient-rich the lettuce." So it's no surprise that romaine lettuce is healthier than a variety like iceberg lettuce, which features mostly white leaves. Here our top 8 in-season greens you should be eating, blending, and juicing:

1. Red/Green Leaf Lettuce: This light and fluffy lettuce make for a great summer salad; they're also great when added to a juice or to a smoothie because they don't have an overwhelming taste. Red and green leaf lettuces can range in pigmentation from light to dark and generally (as with all greens and most fruits and vegetables) the darker the pigmentation the more nutrients they contain. These lettuces contain beta carotene (that is converted to vitamin A), vitamin K that helps with the formation of blood clots, and