

FACT SHEET

## BALANCING YOUR DIET WITH THE GREENS YOU CAN GROW: ASIAN SPINACH AND VEGETABLE AMARANTH

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We all need food. Food provides the nutrients and energy needed to support life. And food can directly affect health. Unhealthy eating and a poor diet compromises growth and development, the immune system, and increases risk to chronic disease or conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high blood pressure. A healthy, well-balanced diet supports physical health, mental function, and improves quality of life.

### What is a Healthy, Balanced Diet?

In general, nutritional requirements vary with gender, age and stage of life, and activity level. A balanced diet provides all the nutrients and energy a person needs to meet his/her individual requirements. A healthy, balanced diet can be achieved by routinely consuming foods from all or most of the food groups each day, and limiting consumption of salt, free sugars, and saturated fats.



It is important to eat a variety of types and colors of fruits and vegetables to get a healthy mix of vitamins, minerals and other healthy plant compounds.

*NOTE:* free sugar (a carbohydrate) provides energy, but not much else; fruits and non-starch vegetables are a major source of vitamins and minerals. Most fresh foods are low in salt/sodium.

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## FOOD GROUPS



- Fresh fruits: mango, pineapple, banana, avocado
- Fresh vegetables: starchy e.g. plantains, cassava, potatoes; non-starchy e.g. leafy greens, carrots, peppers, eggplant
- Grains/whole grains: rice, maize, wheat
- Dairy: milk, yogurt, cheese
- Protein foods: legumes, chicken, beans, nuts, eggs, meats, seafood
- Oils and fats: vegetable oil, butter, avocado, nuts

## NUTRIENTS



- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Proteins
- Fats
- Carbohydrates
- Phytonutrients (e.g. flavonoids)

## ENERGY

*primarily from...*

Carbohydrates: grains, fruits, starchy vegetables

Proteins: eggs, beans, fish

Fat: oil, avocado, nuts

An “excellent” source of a vitamin or mineral is defined as containing 20% or more of the U.S. Daily Value (DV).

A “good” source contains 10-19% of the U.S. DV.

## Green Leafy Vegetables Contribute to a Healthy Diet

Green leafy vegetables are an important part of a healthy, balanced diet. But leafy greens are under-consumed by most people. Based on the U.S. Daily Value (DV), leafy greens such as Asian spinach or vegetable amaranth are a good to excellent source of key vitamins and minerals. A 10- gram serving (approximately one-half to two-thirds cup cooked) provides:

### Asian Spinach

- ⇒ 18% of DV for folate
- ⇒ 55% of DV for vitamin A
- ⇒ 140% of DV for vitamin C
- ⇒ 16% of DV for calcium
- ⇒ 10% of DV for potassium

### Amaranth

- ⇒ 21% of DV for folate
- ⇒ 97% of DV for vitamin A
- ⇒ 70% of DV for vitamin C
- ⇒ 17% of DV for calcium
- ⇒ 13% of DV for iron

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These vegetables are fast growing and easy to cultivate in gardens or farms. Once cleaned, the leaves can be sautéed (perhaps with onion, garlic, peppers or other vegetables) or they could be added to soups or stews to create a healthy, balanced meal.

*A healthy, balanced meal might consist of...*

- Rice with beans and/or chicken— grain & protein
- Plantain — starchy vegetable
- Sautéed amaranth leaves — non-starchy vegetable
- Mango — fruit

*Water to drink; oil for food preparation*

*Or, a healthy, balanced meal could be:*

- Pumpkin soup with Asian spinach — vegetables
- Fish — protein
- Bread — grain
- Avocado — fruit (and fat)

*Water to drink; oil for food preparation*

- These meals contain foods from most of the food groups.
- Food items can be flavored with herbs and spices (very little salt).
- Individual portion sizes are based on individual energy needs.
- Adding green leafy vegetables to meals will enhance nutrient content and contribute to a balanced diet that will help you achieve and maintain good health.
- Growing Asian spinach and leafy amaranth in your garden and consuming more leafy greens is a simple and practical approach to creating a healthier diet for yourself and your family.