Green leafy vegetables provide a wonderfully nourishing—yet relaxing and uplifting—energy to our bodies. They provide us an amazing spectrum of nutrients and phyto-chemicals. On an energetic level they impart flexibility and resilience and openness.

I love my greens! Green veggies always brighten my day and I have them at almost every meal including breakfast. There are so many to choose from. I like bok choy, and various other Chinese greens, Chinese broccoli, kale, and collards. Chinese cabbage is considered a green and is nice in pressed salads.

Although broccoli qualifies color-wise in the category of “greens,” I consider it more as a ground vegetable in terms of energy. However, at some meals I use it as my green vegetable, often cooking it by the shallow boiled method (see below). Use a little salt when cooking broccoli—unlike with other green (leafy) vegetables—as it is hard to digest and the taste is not as appealing without it, unless it is an especially fresh head of broccoli. Since the cooking time is quick, add the salt at the beginning of cooking.

I mostly avoid the green leafy vegetables that contain oxalic acid, which can interfere with mineral metabolism—these include spinach and Swiss chard. Occasionally I do use them—Swiss chard is nice in a chickpea and leek stew, but it is an exception rather than a staple.

I really love the texture of spinach and find that rocket (arugula) makes a great substitute and contributes its own unique taste. Served raw it is quite peppery, but once it is cooked it loses that sharpness.

I love the unique bitterness of chicory and find it incredibly healing to my liver and the rest of me. Dandelion greens also have a strongly beneficial effect on the liver. They grow as weeds everywhere—if you pick them make sure they have not been treated with pesticides!

I also like to use parsley as a steamed or quick-boiled leafy green as it is incredibly high in nutrients. It is a more yang leafy green as shown by its complex leaf structure. One can simply use an entire bunch and easily eat it when cooked. It has a lovely flavor. I love to put it on top of shredded nori while warm and the heat of the cooked parsley then blends into the nori for a tender and flavor-filled and unexpected side dish. This is also nice topped with a drop of flax seed or toasted sesame oil.

Think of varying how the greens are cooked. The variety in macrobiotics is not just about the ingredients but also the different energy that different cooking methods provide.

- Steaming.
- Pressed salad (actually a form of cooking but with no heat)—the veggies are “cooked” with pressed...
sure, salt, and time.

- Quick boiling (have water at a rapid boil and dunk in the vegetables until they become very bright and remove from the hot water immediately). Some varieties may need a little longer. Don’t overcook them! Watch the clock. Soft greens like bok choy usually need one to three minutes while tougher greens like kale and broccoli greens may need four to five minutes until they are tender and easily edible.

- Water sautéed—like a stir-fry, but using water instead of oil. High heat, lid off the pan and use chopsticks or a wooden spoon to move the veggies around so they don’t burn or stick—best done with veggies chopped finely.

- Boiled salad—like quick boiling but each vegetable is submerged separately—start with the least strongly flavored vegetable first so the cooking water doesn’t take on the taste of the vegetables too much. Then combine and dress (optional) with a dressing.

- Shallow boiled—place veggies in pan with tight fitting lid and cook with a little water—about one inch or just below the level of the veggies. Cook at high heat with the lid on. You will soon get a feel for how long to cook and how much water to use so that after a few minutes the veggies are cooked to perfection and there is little or no water left. You can remove the lid and boil off the extra water if some remains. Be careful not to burn the pan!

- Oil sautéed—this may not be suitable on focused healing diets initially but can be enjoyed later from time to time. Sauté the vegetables at moderate heat (never let oil smoke) until they turn bright green but are still crisp and crunchy. This provides a lot of dynamic fire energy.

It is best not to use salt when cooking greens as it brings out their bitter flavor in a way that can be unpleasant to some palates. Sometimes I chop the greens before cooking, sometimes afterwards. That changes the energy as well.

Sometimes I slice the greens with great precision and end up with very fine greens which need less cooking time and other times I enjoy the energy of more roughly chopped and larger pieces. Sometimes I serve them whole.

If using tough or slippery textured greens, I try to present them in a way that is easy to eat. So chopping them before or after cooking is something I do regularly. I have been served Chinese greens in Asian restaurants in a way that looked pretty but was nearly impossible to eat in a way that was anywhere near graceful!

Once in a while I roll up the greens before serving them, with or without a filling like a pickle or a spoonful of sauerkraut, or a small piece of sea vegetable or tororo kombu or some seeds or nuts, grains, or beans. You could even try a piece of cooked tofu or tempeh inside.

It is nice to use a garnish on greens, though not always necessary. Contrasting colors are pleasant.

Some suggestions include:

- grated raw carrot
- grated raw beets
- grated raw vegetables that have been marinated
- carrot pickles

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Ilanit Tof is a long-time macrobiotic explorer who lives in Melbourne, Australia. Her new macrobiotic cookbook Seasonal Variation: Whole Summer Meals is available at her website: www.littletree.com.au.

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- sauerkraut
- nori sea vegetable strips
- black sesame seeds
- white sesame seeds
- pumpkin seeds
- tahini mixed with ume paste
- tahini mixed with miso or shoyu
- a splash of rice or umeboshi vinegar
- a squeeze of lemon juice
- chopped chives or spring onions
- boiled corn off the cob
- dulse flakes
- kelp granules
- green nori flakes mixed with ume shiso sprinkle

Most of all enjoy them!