

Broccoli

adapted from the World's Healthiest Foods

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Description

Broccoli is a member of the cabbage family, and is closely related to cauliflower. Its cultivation originated in Italy. *Broccolo*, its Italian name, means "cabbage sprout." Broccoli's name is derived from the Latin word *brachium*, which means branch or arm, a reflection of its tree-like shape that features a compact head of florets attached by small stems to a larger stalk. Because of its different components, this vegetable provides a complex of tastes and textures, ranging from soft and flowery (the florets) to fibrous and crunchy (the stem and stalk). Its color can range from deep sage to dark green to purplish-green, depending upon the variety. One of the most popular types of broccoli sold in North America is known as Italian green, or Calabrese, named after the Italian province of Calabria where it first grew.

Other vegetables related to broccoli are broccolini, a mix between broccoli and *gai-lin* (Chinese broccoli), and broccoflower, a cross between broccoli and cauliflower. Broccoli sprouts have also recently become popular as a result of research uncovering their high concentration of the anti-cancer phytonutrient, sulforaphane.

The health benefits of broccoli along with the easy availability of this super vegetable make it one of our most popular vegetables.

Throughout the year, broccoli is one of the easiest foods to locate, as most supermarkets across the United States offer a hearty supply of the nutrient-rich vegetable.

While broccoli has gotten a bad reputation as being one of the most dreaded vegetables on the dinner plate for a child, there are actually many different delicious ways to prepare the vegetable with the alluring green stalk and bushy top.

In addition to satisfying the daily requirements for fruit and vegetable intake, there are a variety of health benefits attached to the consumption of broccoli.

Health Benefits of Broccoli

Broccoli provides a high amount of vitamin C, which aids iron absorption in the body, prevents the development of cataracts, and also eases the symptoms of the common cold.

The folic acid in broccoli helps women sustain normal tissue growth and is often used as a supplement when taking birth control pills and during pregnancies.

The potassium in broccoli aids those battling high blood pressure, while a large amount of calcium helps combat osteoporosis.

The vegetable is also fiber-rich, which enhances the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, as well as aims to reduce blood cholesterol levels.

In recent years, broccoli has made the headlines regarding three components found in the vegetable. For instance, indole-3-carbinol has captured the attention of those looking to prevent hormone-related cancers, such as breast- and prostate cancer.

I3C promotes "good" hormones, while working against destructive ones. The sulforaphane in broccoli also helps to increase the level of enzymes that block cancer, while the beta-carotene in broccoli transforms into vitamin A within the body, providing an effective antioxidant that destroys free radicals (responsible for weakening the defense of cells).

Additionally, the health benefits of broccoli have been linked to preventing and controlling the following medical concerns: Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, calcium deficiencies, stomach and colon cancer, malignant tumors, lung cancer, heart disease, arthritis, and even the aging process.

Cooking With Broccoli

While it may take some a bit of time to get used to eating raw broccoli, the use of French onion, ranch, or other dips help bring broccoli to life.

My personal favorite is to shred the broccoli stems and make broccoli slaw. Just use your favorite cole slaw recipe and substitute the broccoli for cabbage.

Some people avoid eating the stems of the vegetable, but peeling away the tough outer skin, slicing then into small pieces, or cooking them whole tastes great with a little teriyaki sauce. Overall, to get the health benefits of broccoli, it can be boiled, steamed, eaten raw, and baked with great-tasting accompaniments, such as a good tasting creamy cheese.

Broccoli also decorates casseroles, rice dishes, and is an excellent addition to a salad.

This versatile vegetable is also used to make delicious soups, including the Broccoli Cheese and Cream of Broccoli options commonly served at high end restaurants.

When preparing the vegetable, it is important to remember that overcooking broccoli equals a reduction in vital nutrients (especially when boiling in water). To savor every last drop of vitamins and healthy components, you should try steaming, microwaving, or preparing broccoli in a tasty stir-fry.

Also, the next time you're shopping for vegetables, note that some broccoli tops appear purplier than others, meaning they possess a higher level of carotenoids, which is better for your health.

The health benefits of broccoli are so great that it is one of those foods that should be a regular addition to your menu.

How to Select and Store

Choose broccoli with floret clusters that are compact and not bruised. They should be uniformly colored, either dark green, sage or purple-green, depending upon variety, and with no yellowing. In addition, they should not have any yellow flowers blossoming through, as this is a sign of over maturity. The stalk and stems should be firm with no slimy spots appearing either there or on the florets. If leaves are attached, they should be vibrant in color and not wilted.

Place broccoli in a plastic bag, removing as much of the air from the bag as possible. Store in the refrigerator where it will keep for 10 days. Do not wash broccoli before storing because exposure to water encourages spoilage. Partial heads of broccoli should be placed in a well-sealed container or plastic bag and refrigerated. Since the vitamin C content starts to quickly degrade once broccoli has been cut, it is best to use it within a couple of days. Broccoli that has been blanched and then frozen can stay up to a year. Leftover cooked broccoli should be placed in tightly covered container and stored in the refrigerator where it will keep for a few days.

Tips for Preparing Broccoli

Rinse broccoli under cold running water. Cut florets into quarters for quick and even cooking. Be sure to enjoy the stems and leaves of broccoli; they provide a good balance of flavors. Peel the broccoli stem and cut the stem into 1/2" slices To get unique health benefits from broccoli, let it sit for several minutes before cooking.

The Healthiest Way of Cooking Broccoli

If you're cooking broccoli, make sure to support your nourishment by sticking with a low cooking temperature in a range that includes the steaming temperature of 212°F (100°C), with a cooking times of 5 minutes at the most. Since the fibrous stems take longer to cook, they can be prepared separately for a few minutes before adding the

florets. For quicker cooking, make lengthwise slits in the stems. While people do not generally eat the leaves, they are perfectly edible and contain concentrated amounts of nutrients.

We recommend Healthy Steaming broccoli for maximum nutrition and flavor. Fill the bottom of a steamer pot with 2 inches of water. While waiting for the water to come to a rapid boil prepare broccoli florets and stems. Steam stems for 2 minutes before adding the florets and leaves. Steam for 5 more minutes. Toss with our Mediterranean Dressing and top with your favorite optional ingredients.. For details see, [5-Minute Broccoli with Feta Cheese and Kalamata Olives](#).

A Few Quick Serving Ideas

- Toss pasta with olive oil, pine nuts and steamed broccoli florets. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- Purée cooked broccoli and cauliflower, then combine with seasonings of your choice to make a simple, yet delicious, soup.
- Add broccoli florets and chopped stalks to omelets.

For more information about broccoli and other healthy foods, go to the [World's Healthiest Foods](#) website.