

January 6, 2023

Release Date: January 11, 2023

Joi Vogin, MS, LDN

Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

BLACK-EYED PEAS AND COLLARD GREENS BRING GOOD LUCK FOR THE NEW YEAR

If you are hoping for good luck in 2023, I will share one of my southern secrets: start the year with a generous helping of black-eyed peas and collard greens. Legend has it you will get a dollar for every black-eyed pea you eat, and more for every leaf of greens.

I grew up with this New Year's tradition, happily eating those delicious peas and dipping my hot buttered cornbread into the savory "pot liquor" (or potlikker), which is the cooking liquid from the collards. I didn't eat too much of the greens until I was older. But I knew there was something special about collards to have them at every holiday meal, and as an essential part of New Year's Day.

Related to cabbage, broccoli, and kale, collards are a broad leafed cruciferous vegetable that are well-loved in southern cuisine. When cooked, these plants give off a strong smell due to naturally-occurring sulfur compounds. Though the strong odor may be unappetizing to some, the smelly sulfur compounds are powerful phytochemicals that help prevent cancer formation. Additionally, collard greens are packed with vitamins and minerals and are great sources of fiber and calcium.

Cooking collard greens is not hard, but it is labor intensive. Like most meals we make from scratch, the more love you put in the more delicious the final product. If you are already cooking kale you can use your same methods for collards, but you may need to increase the cooking time. Collard leaves are larger and thicker than kale, requiring a longer time on the heat to get to your preferred tenderness.

Tenderness. It's a must for southern-style cooking. Some may say we cook things to "mush." I say we cook food a long time because we like it tender, and we like to add a lot of love. Although it is safe to eat greens like collards and kale raw or braised, I prefer mine cooked low and slow until very tender.

Proper preparation of your collards is the key to an amazing dish of greens. My mom and grandmas would spend a long time "cleaning" collards before they would go in the pot. First, we would visit the farmer's market to get big bunches of the large leaves. Then we would take apart the bunches and rinse the leaves really good because they would often be muddy from harvest.

Next, we would de-stem the leaves by tearing them away from the center stalk and rib. After de-stemming we would cut the leaves or tear by hand into smaller pieces, and then toss them into a large pot with a little water and some fatback, porkchops, or bacon to cook until tender. I was amazed at how those big bunches of leaves would cook down to a few cups in the pot.

Nowadays, the collards I find at the market are pretty clean so they just need a quick rinse before de-stemming. You may be tempted to chop the whole leaf and not remove the center leaf stem, but I encourage you not to skip this step! It will add a few more minutes to your prep time, but you will be rewarded with a more tender and pleasant pot of greens. I don't use a knife, I just tear the leaves away from the center rib with my hands. Note: frozen and pre-cut greens are usually not de-stemmed before chopping so you get a lot of stems in every mouthful.

Seasoning collards is a matter of personal preference. Some like them cooked with meat, some cook without. Some like them spicy, while some add a bit of sugar for sweetness. I started cooking collards years ago when I was vegetarian, using just onion, garlic, and salt for seasoning. Today I often add leftover ham or porkchops to the pot while they are cooking. You can also add raw porkchops or bacon to your pot to cook with the greens. Whether you use meat or not, you want to use some oil in your recipe to help your body absorb the fat-soluble vitamins abundant in collard greens.

In the recipe I share this month, you can substitute kale of any variety. You also can skip the seasoning meat if you prefer. I find it a good way to use leftover ham or pork—I keep my “cooking meat” in the freezer for these occasions. If you're new to cooking greens, be aware that the leaves release a lot of water and cook down to a much smaller volume. If you are feeding four greens lovers or want leftovers, I would get two bunches. The liquid that is released cooks down to create that delicious “pot liquor” broth—be sure to have some cornbread on hand to “sop” it up.

It's traditional to top your greens with spicy or plain vinegar or hot sauce. Serve your collards with black-eyed peas, red beans and rice, or potatoes. Don't forget to have a nice hunk of bread for dipping. I also love to make poached eggs with the leftover greens and pot liquor for brunch. Enjoy y'all, and happy new year!

TENDER COLLARD GREENS

2 bunches collard greens or kale
1 medium onion, diced
2-4 cloves garlic, chopped
2 Tbsp olive oil or bacon fat
1/2 - 1 teaspoon salt
1 - 2 cups water
1 teaspoon cumin seeds (optional)
1/2 teaspoon hot pepper flakes (optional)
1 cup ham pieces for seasoning (optional)
Vinegar and hot sauce

TENDER COLLARD GREENS (continued)

Prepare your greens: rinse the leaves and de-stem by tearing the leaves from the center rib. You can also fold the leaves in half and use a knife to cut out the center rib. Tear or chop the leaves into smaller pieces. Place a large pot on medium heat and add olive oil or bacon fat. Add cumin seeds and pepper flakes to the hot oil, stir gently and allow to cook 15-20 seconds to season the oil—watch carefully so they don't burn. Add onion, garlic and salt and sauté 5 minutes. Add all of your greens to the pot and cover for 3-5 minutes to wilt the greens. Remove cover and mix greens and onions well using a long-handled spoon or tongs. Add water but do not submerge your greens. The leaves will release a lot of water during cooking. Add seasoning meat if using, then cover and simmer on medium-low heat for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the cover and allow to cook 10-20 minutes to your preferred tenderness and to concentrate broth. Adjust salt if needed. Serve greens with broth and top with a dash of vinegar and hot sauce.



Photos courtesy of
Joi Vogin



I will be holding a ***Dining with Diabetes program in February, 2023***. This 4-week session includes diabetes education and food tastings and is open to adults with pre-diabetes or diabetes. For more information and to register, please visit go.umd.edu/dwd or call the Extension office at 301-600-1599.

Joi Vogin, MS, LDN is a licensed nutritionist and clinical herbalist with 25 years of experience in nutrition science and public health education. Joi teaches nutrition and wellness classes throughout Frederick County as the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent with University of Maryland Extension in Frederick. She welcomes your favorite recipes and suggestions for future articles. Joi can be reached at jvogin@umd.edu or 301-600-3573.

For more information about the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County Office check out our website <https://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county> . University programs, activities, and facilities are available to all without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation, physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally protected class.

JV:ls