



Climbing Spinach

Basella rubra

COMMUNITY GARDEN TO KITCHEN SERIES

A tender plant, best treated as an annual in cooler climates.

Basella rubra (red stalk) and Basella alba (green stalk) are also known as Malabar spinach, Indian spinach, Ceylon spinach, Vine spinach, Perpetual and Perennial spinach. Which is surprising, as it isn't a spinach nor, according to some people, does it even taste like spinach. Yet here we are.

Basella rubra is a very fast-growing vine native to tropical Africa and Asia. The darkgreen semi-succulent leaves are broadly ovate, up to about 12 cm long. They have a mucilaginous texture, and so are useful as a thickener in soups and stir-fry, and can be eaten either raw or cooked. The plants bloom almost non-stop, given the right conditions.

The inflorescence is a simple spike in the axil of the leaves. The flowers are small, and pinkish-white to red, producing hard purple-black seeds.

Basella rubra loves the heat and prefers a rich, moist soil. Propagate by cuttings or seed, which germinates quickly within a week to a fortnight of sowing. Begin to harvest the young tips when the plant reaches 40 cm

Both Basella alba and Basella rubra are edible, but the commercially-grown cultivars belong to Basella alba.

HARVESTING

Tips - to the third newest set of leaves
Fresh-looking older leaves.

An Old World genus of around 5 species, 3 of which are endemic on Madagascar. One species is cultivated and often naturalised throughout the tropics, including Christmas Island
- Flora of Australia Online

- Leaves yield saponin, vitamins A and B.
- Fruit yields mucilage and iron.
- Study of wild Basella rubra showed it to be abundant in carotene, middle in vitamin C, and low in nitrate. Nitrate in planted B. rubra is about twice that of the wild variety.

A perennial in tropical areas, Basella is best treated as a summer annual in colder climes. where the seed has been known to self-sow and germinate during the following Spring, although this is rare.

Stems will readily root and creep along the ground or twine upwards around stakes or through fences. Due to the ease of spread, Basella alba (with a green stalk and white flowers) is listed as a potential environmental weed in tropical parts of Australia. The ability to spread is curtailed with the onset of cooler days.

A rapid, colourful grower for the hottest months only.



Quick Facts

- *Vine Height 2-3m
- * Full sun
- * Well-draining soil
- * water regularly
- * Harvest regularly in Summer
- * Can be potted
- * Does not taste like spinach

But Wait, there's more!

A PUBLICATION BY THE MERINO FOOD GROUP





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Nutrition Facts

Malabar spinach, cooked
Amount Per 100 grams
Calories 23

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 0.8 g 1%

Cholesterol 0 mg 0%

Sodium 55 mg 2%

Potassium 220 mg 7%

Total Carb 2.7 g 0%

Dietary fiber 2.1 g 8%

Protein 3g 6%

Vitamin A 23%

Vitamin C 9%

Calcium 12%

Iron 8%

Vitamin D 0%

Vitamin B-6 5%

Vitamin B-12 0%

Magnesium 12%

* Per cent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Lemony Rice Salad

- 1 cup Basmati Rice
- 1/4 cup fresh Lemon juice (1 or 2 lemons)
- 1/4 cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1/2 tsp Chilli flakes or to taste
- Freshly ground Black Pepper
- 1 small clove Garlic, minced finely
- 2 cloves Shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 sprigs fresh Oregano, finely chopped
- 2 Tbsp fresh chives, finely sliced
- 1/4 cup Italian Parsley, chopped
- 1 cup Leek, thinly sliced
- 1 cup Rocket leaves, sliced
- 1 cup Basella, sliced in wide ribbons
- 1/2 cup Kalamata Olives, chopped
- 1 Fennel Bulb, chopped
- 1 Carrot, shredded
- 2 cups Corn kernels, (or frozen, defrosted)
- 1 cup Feta Cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 cup lightly toasted Pine nuts (for garnish)

Cook the rice in scant 2 cups of water. Cool slightly - about 10 minutes.

Prepare the dressing: mash the minced garlic and a pinch of salt on a cutting board with the side of a knife until macerated. Combine the garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, black pepper, chilli flakes and all the herbs in a large mixing bowl. Whisk together well.

Fluff the rice gently with a fork, add it while still hot to the dressing and gently mix.

Stir in the leek, spinach, and rocket; the hot rice will wilt the veggies slightly. Allow the rice mixture to cool to room temperature, about 20 minutes.

Stir in the rest of the ingredients and mix gently but thoroughly. Serve right away or chill until needed. Allow the salad to warm to room temperature if made ahead of time and chilled.

Garnish with the pine nuts before serving.

Metric cup - 250g/250ml (a coffee mug works just as well for this recipe)

A cup of leaves shrinks to about a tablespoon when cooked.

The leaves need very little cooking For a "spinachy" taste, stir over heat with garlic and olive oil, sprinkle with apple cider vinegar, toss and serve

The larger leaves are perfect for thickening soups, curries and stir-frys.

Jungle Slaw

Mix half a grated onion, 1 handful of sliced Ceylon Spinach, 1 handful diced cabbage, 1 handful of tender beans cut into slivers, 1 grated carrot, half cup diced pineapple, half a green capsicum, cut finely.

Toss to combine with half a cup mayonnaise, and half cup unsalted peanuts

Serve on a bed of Ceylon spinach leaves.

For extra flavour, lightly toast, or lightly grill the peanuts.

**from Rare Fruit Australia*

Use in any recipe that calls for spinach, with noodles and in stir-fry. In Japan, it is cooked in tempura or ohitashi and dressed with a sesame seed dressing.

The fruits of this plant contain a red dye that has been used for official seals. It can also be used as a food colorant.

But Wait, there's more!

