

## What are microgreens?

### From Wikipedia

A **microgreen** is a tiny vegetable green that is used both as a visual and flavor component or ingredient primarily in fine dining restaurants. Fine dining chefs use microgreens to enhance the beauty, taste and freshness of their dishes with their delicate textures and distinctive flavors. Smaller than “baby greens,” and harvested later than “sprouts,” microgreens can provide a variety of leaf flavors, such as sweet and spicy. They are also known for their various colors and textures. Among upscale markets, they are now considered a specialty genre of greens that are good for garnishing salads, soups, plates, and sandwiches.

Edible young greens and grains are produced from various kinds of vegetables, herbs or other plants. They range in size from 1” to 3” including the stem and leaves. A microgreen has a single central stem which has been cut just above the soil line during harvesting. It has fully developed cotyledon leaves and usually has one pair of very small, partially developed true leaves. The average crop-time for most microgreens is 10–14 days from seeding to harvest.

Researchers at the USDA Agricultural Research Service have published, as of early 2014, several studies that identify the nutritional make-up and the shelf life of microgreens. Twenty-five varieties were tested, key nutrients measured were ascorbic acid (vitamin C), tocopherols (vitamin E), phyloquinone (vitamin K), and beta-carotene (a vitamin A precursor), plus other related carotenoids in the cotyledons.

Among the 25 microgreens tested, red cabbage, cilantro, garnet amaranth, and green daikon radish had the highest concentrations of vitamin C, carotenoids, vitamin K, and vitamin E, respectively. In general, microgreens contained considerably higher levels of vitamins and carotenoids—about five times greater—than their mature plant counterparts, an indication that microgreens may be worth the trouble of delivering them fresh during their short lives.

A nutritional study of microgreens was done in the summer of 2012 by the Department of Nutrition and Food Science, University of Maryland, indicating promising potential that microgreens may indeed have particularly high nutritional value compared to mature vegetables. Bhimu Patil, a professor of horticulture and director of the Vegetable and Fruit Improvement Center at Texas A&M University, agrees that microgreens may potentially have higher levels of nutrients than mature vegetables. But he says more studies are needed to compare the two side by side. "This is a very good start, but there can be a lot of variation in nutrients depending on where you grow it, when you harvest, and the soil medium," Patil says. When choosing a microgreen, researchers say to look for the most intensely colored ones, which will be the most nutritious. Results of the microgreens research project conducted by the University of Maryland and the USDA has garnered attention from several national media outlets including National Public Radio (NPR) and The Huffington Post.