

Broccoli – the infamous florets

It's mean, it's green, and it's a cancer and age fighting machine.

Broccoli may be a curse word in many children's vocabulary, or even in many adults' vocabularies. I am sure at one point or another everyone has been forced to eat a few more pieces of broccoli than they wanted to, but the good news is that all that extra time you spent as a child at the dinner table not allowed to get up until you ate your broccoli was worth it. Honest!!

The name broccoli, comes from an Italian word meaning branch or arm. Indeed the broccoli plant does give the appearance of reaching up, perhaps in search of a creamy cheese sauce.

Broccoli has had mixed response over the years. You either love it or hate it. However if you are a vegetarian then one important fact you need to register right now is that Broccoli is the best source of Vegetarian Iron!!

Broccoli actually has some serious health benefits which if understood well would then start featuring on our menus on a regular basis.

Apart from being great for your bones, your heart and your skin Broccoli is a great source of antioxidants. To explain further: Broccoli is a Superfood for your bones because just one serving (1 medium stalk) is a top source of vitamin K, vitamin C and folate, and a good source of manganese and potassium – a combination of nutrients that promote strong and healthy bones.

In addition, broccoli contains one of the highest amounts of calcium among vegetables, with over 70 mg of calcium. While calcium is very well known for its bone benefits, researchers now believe other nutrients also play a key role in building your bones.

Broccoli is an antioxidant Superfood because it is a top source of antioxidant vitamin C and also contains antioxidants..

Just 1 cup of broccoli a day protects from a number of cancers, particularly cancers of the lung, stomach, colon, and rectum. Getting your daily servings of these veggies is like getting a dose of chemoprevention therapy!

Broccoli is the vegetable with the strongest inverse association with colon cancer, especially in those younger than 65 with a history of smoking. If you've ever smoked, eat up your broccoli and fast!

About 25 percent of the population inherit an aversion to the bitter taste of cruciferous vegetables. If you are not a fan of broccoli then at least let your spouse or kids try it out!! Introduce it into your cooking so that they can start developing a palette early on. Especially with young kids and infants, try and introduce it early in their mashed vegetable puree.

As for yourself if you absolutely can't stand the taste of this curious cross between a cauliflower and asparagus then try adding a little bit of salt and it will make it taste sweeter. Another way to make broccoli more palatable for those who cannot stand the taste is to add some lemon to the boiling water which will take away the bitterness.

In worst case scenarios, other mums will agree that devious designing of dishes enables them to disguise the offending veggies for the younger audiences.

If your child is absolutely averse to broccoli then try to boil/steam it and then blenderise it and add to soups or casseroles. This way you are still retaining all the goodness of broccoli whilst breaking it down enough so it loses its distinct shape!!

You can use broccoli in stir-fries with low-sodium soy sauce or add them to casseroles and lasagnes. Remember the stalks are just as beneficial as the florets so do not chuck them out. Chop them up to make vegetable broth/stock which in turn can be used in casseroles, soups and pasta sauces etc to give it that extra boost of flavour as well as nutrients.

Warm broccoli and chicken salad



This lovely warm salad is full of flavours and good-for-you things. Chicken breasts are marinated in a tangy dressing then grilled until charred brown. Add sweet, nutty-tasting broccoli, fresh salad and crusty bread and you've got a delicious meal that's healthy too.

Serves: 4

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into chunky strips
Small handful of fresh basil leaves, roughly chopped
Grated zest of 1 lemon
150g (5oz) mixed salad leaves
150g (5oz) cherry tomatoes, halved
6 spring onions, sliced
1tbsp sunflower oil
1 clove garlic, crushed
200g (7oz) young broccoli florets
25g (1oz) pine nuts, toasted
Salt and pepper

To serve
Crusty garlic bread

Dressing

1 tsp wholegrain mustard

1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

2-3 tbsp olive oil

Small handful fresh tarragon leaves, chopped

1. Put the chicken strips in a bowl, add the tarragon, lemon zest, salt and pepper and mix well. Leave to marinate in the fridge for a few hours.
2. Mix the dressing ingredients in a small bowl and set aside.
3. When you're ready to eat, put the salad leaves, tomatoes and spring onions in a serving bowl and season with salt and pepper.
4. Grill the chicken for about 7 mins, turning occasionally, until it acquires a charred look and is cooked through. Add the garlic for the last min. Take the chicken fillet off the grill add the dressing and stir, coating the chicken
5. Meanwhile, boil or steam the broccoli in boiling, salted water for 4-5 mins or until just tender.
6. Top the salad with the broccoli and chicken and sprinkle with toasted pine nuts.

Serve immediately with crusty garlic bread and freshly milled pepper. Invite a few friends round for this delicious lunch option and sit back with that feel good factor!!

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