

## Spinach and Feta a Lively Couple



**By Steve Petusevsky**  
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Romeo and Juliet, Bonnie and Clyde, Sonny and Cher...spinach and feta. Like lovers destined to be soul mates forever, spinach and feta are the culinary couple that will always be used in the same recipe with no possibility of separation or divorce.

Sure there are other ingredients that belong together and are inseparable. Basil and tomatoes, peaches and cream, olive oil and balsamic vinegar all adore one another. However, spinach and feta are different.

It seems everywhere I travel these two ingredients end up with one another. They cross all ethnic bounds and global borders. Throughout the Mediterranean this couple flourishes. Grecian spinach pies such as spanakopita ooze with spinach and melted feta when you bite into them. Street food in Israel, Morocco and Tunisia, Turkish phyllo pastries called boreks and even Italian stuffing for vegetables and meats depend on this duo.

I've had pizza in Prague topped with spinach and feta and quiche in Provence filled with the same. I ate garlic spinach with crumbled aged feta at night in Andalusia. Ever had spinach and feta dip or shells stuffed with this couple? How did these two become so universally popular?

Because they taste so good, and they are readily available.

Spinach was first cultivated in Persia, where it was used to feed the huge population of cats in ancient Iran. Spinach made its way to China in the 7th century when the king of Nepal sent it as a gift. Spinach has a much more recent history in Europe than many other vegetables. It was only brought to that continent in the 11th century, when the Moors introduced it into Spain.

Spinach was the favorite vegetable of Catherine de Medici in the 16th century. When she left her home in Florence, Italy, to marry the king of France, she brought along her cooks, who prepared spinach the ways that she especially liked it. Since then, dishes prepared "a la Florentine" come on a bed of spinach.

Aside from the recent health scares involving spinach, this green is an excellent source of vitamin K, vitamin A, manganese, folate, magnesium, iron, vitamin C, vitamin B2, calcium,

potassium and vitamin B6. It is a very good source of dietary fiber, copper, protein, phosphorous, zinc and vitamin E. In addition, it is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, niacin and selenium. There is some concern about oxalate, a naturally occurring chemical in some foods, including spinach. When oxalates become too concentrated in body fluids, they can crystallize and cause health problems. For this reason, individuals with already existing and untreated kidney or gallbladder problems may want to avoid eating spinach.

I enjoy spinach and feta raw in salads, cooked in stuffings and baked into pastry. Try these spinach and feta recipes that are among my favorites.

### **Spinach feta edamame hummus**

Steve's tip: This protein-packed dip is great on sandwiches, crackers or chips. Shelled edamame, or soybeans, can be found in most frozen food sections. I add the edamame at the end of the pureeing process so they remain chunky.

- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed well
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen spinach leaves, defrosted and squeezed to remove excess moisture
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 teaspoons hot sauce
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta
- Salt, to taste
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup shelled, cooked edamame

Place the chickpeas, spinach, garlic, tahini, lemon juice, hot sauce, feta and salt in a food processor fitted with the metal blade or blender. With the machine running, slowly drizzle the oil into the blender and puree about 2 minutes until smooth. Add the edamame and use 2 or 3 on/off pulses until combined. Chill and serve. Makes 4 cups.

Per (1/4-cup) serving: 99 calories, 52 percent calories from fat, 6 grams total fat, 1 gram saturated fat, 4 milligrams cholesterol, 8 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams total fiber, 0.76 gram total sugars, 6 grams net carbs, 4 grams protein, 101 milligrams sodium.

### **Spinach and feta orzo**

- 1/2 pound uncooked orzo pasta
- Water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, defrosted, squeezed to remove excess moisture
- 1/2 teaspoon dried red chili flakes
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped kalamata olives
- 1/4 cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes

Cook orzo pasta in a large pot of boiling water about 12 minutes, drain, rinse under cold water in a colander and drain again.

Meanwhile, heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and garlic and saute 3 minutes until softened. Add the defrosted spinach and continue to saute 4 minutes until tender. Add the red chili flakes and cooked orzo and continue to saute 2 minutes longer. Remove from the heat and add the feta, olives and sun-dried tomatoes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes 6 servings.

Per serving: 232 calories, 24 percent calories from fat, 6 grams total fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 11 milligrams cholesterol, 35 grams carbohydrates, 3 grams total fiber, 5 grams total sugars, 32 grams net carbs, 9 grams protein, 299 milligrams sodium.

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