Swiss Chard

Selecting Fresh Swiss Chard:

- Look for bunches that are firm with no wilting leaves. The wide, fan-like green leaves should be vivid green in color, free from brown/yellow spots & tiny holes, and look like they're "at attention" (standing straight up).
- Stalks should look crisp and unblemished. They range in color from white, red & yellow; there is not a big difference in taste, but white stalks are most tender.

Measuring Fresh Swiss Chard:

1 pound = 4 cups stalks + 5 cups leaves = 1½ cups cooked stalks + 1 cup cooked leaves

Handling and Storing:

- Store unwashed chard leaves and stalks separately in plastic bags in the fridge.
- Chard leaves stay good for 2 to 3 days and stalks are good for 3 to 5 days.
- **To freeze**: wash whole chard well and remove leaves from their stalks (trim ends & set aside). Add leaves to boiling water for 2 minutes; quickly put them in ice water for 30 seconds. Drain completely & pat leaves dry with a towel. Put divided portions of leaves & stalks in separate freezer-safe bags; press air out, seal, date, & store for 8 to 12 months. Defrost in the refrigerator.

Preparation and Serving:

- Wash chard well to remove any sand or soil stuck in the leaves. Swirl cut chard in a bowl of cool water, quickly rinse under cool running water & repeat one more time.
- If stalks are too fibrous, make a small cut near base of stalk and peel away fibers. **Remember:** stalks take longer to cook than leaves, so their cook time should start a few minutes earlier. Stalks should be cut to equal sizes so they cook evenly.
- Do not cook chard in an aluminum pot; it will cause the pot to discolor.
- To remove some of the bitterness, try quick boiling chard leaves. Place whole leaves into boiling water and cook for 2-3 minutes, until leaves taste sweet. Run under cold water & squeeze the water out. Keep in a tightly packed ball to make cutting easier.
- Use whole leaves as wraps for your favorite meat, grain, or vegetable filling. Add boiled, sautéed, or steamed leaves to pasta, egg dishes, soups, lasagna, or enchiladas. Use it like spinach!
- Stalks can be baked, boiled, or sautéed and used like celery. Season & eat alone or add them to stir-fry, pastas, or stocks.

Nutrition Facts: one serving = 1 cup, boiled, chopped leaves: Calories 35, Protein 3 grams, Carbohydrates 7 grams, Sugar 2 grams, Fat 0 grams, Fiber 4 grams. Chard leaves are an excellent source of vitamins A, C, & K and a good source of vitamin E, & fiber.

References: http://southernfood.about.com/library/info/blequivs.htm, http://www.vegancoach.com/ swiss-chard-recipe.html, http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/vegetables-and-vegetable-products/2400/2, http://www.whfoods.com /genpage .php?tname= foodspice&dbid=16#purchasequalities, http://www. examiner.com/x-26576 -Fort-Worth-Sustainable-Food-Examiner~y2010m5d26-Swiss-chard-Nutritional-value-and-uses?cid=edition-by-channel-rss-Fort_Worth-Food_and_Drink, http://www.doityourself .com/stry/swiss-chard-storage-tips

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Baked Parmesan Stems $

Serves 4

Ingredients:

2 bunches of chard stems
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 Tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
Black pepper to taste

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 400°F. Bring a pot of water to a boil.

Remove leaves from stalks and save them, unwashed in the refrigerator for use in another recipe.

Trim any discolored ends from chard stems and cut at an angle into 3 inch pieces. If some stems are very thick, cut them lengthwise so all pieces are about the same thickness. Once water starts to boil add salt and chard stems and boil for about 6 minutes. Drain chard well and pat dry with a towel.

Spray or lightly coat a non-stick baking dish with olive oil. Place one layer of chard in the baking dish and lightly mist or drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with cheese. Repeat layers of chard, olive oil and cheese until chard is gone. Bake about 20 minutes, or until stalks are softened and cheese is slightly browned on the edges. Season with fresh ground black pepper if desired. Serve warm and enjoy!

Approximate Pricing Scale

$ = less than $15 **$$** = $15-$20 **$$$** = $20-$25