

MUSTARD GREENS

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Follow our step-by-step, recipe for making our southern style Mustard Greens. Greens dominate the fresh produce available here in the South during the winter, and we'll show you how to cook some up for a great side dish, or even the main meal of the day. They'll go great with a hunk of cornbread.

I've sometimes wondered about God's thinking regarding produce during the winter. Here it is,

middle of January, it's cold, the trees are bare and kinda drab looking, and the pickings are pretty slim at my favorite Farmer's Market.

Greens seem to dominate everywhere. You'll find Collards, Kale, Spinach, Turnip Greens, Mustard Greens, Winter Cabbage, and a few others.

Next, you'll find a good number of Sweet Potatoes. At least they come in a couple of various colors, what with the purple ones, red ones, and the white one's.

Apples, Bok Choy, Pecans, Red Potatoes, Onions and just a few other items seem to be about all you'll find this time of year. YES, it's a graciously good plenty of things, but it's just not the bounty of summer. Maybe we aren't suppose to have too much of a good thing.

Maybe, just maybe, God intends for us to enjoy the green colors of summer grass, shrubs and trees, through all the green vegetables He provides during the winter. Green is the hope of Spring and better things to come.

As you may already know, I'm not a fan of green vegetables. I know I should be, and I know they're suppose to be good for me. I've just never acquired a taste for them. I totally dislike collards, even though Mama probably cooked them as good as anyone possibly could. She liked them, Daddy liked them, my sister liked them, and my older brother seems to think there isn't much of anything any better. That even includes desserts.

You may also be wondering how I can prepare and present a recipe for greens, even if I don't like them.

How can I even cook any that are any good? If I don't eat them, how do I know I can cook them right?

It would be a valid question for sure.

I'd just have to say that you probably haven't a clue as to how many chef's, cooks, home cooks included, prepare items each and every day that they don't personally like. Am I right?

If you invited me to your house, and you prepared some type of greens, I'd certainly take out a teaspoon of them just to taste them. Somewhere deep down inside, I think I'm still holding out that

someone somewhere, may be be able to cook some that I like. So far, it hasn't actually happened.

Besides relying on my memories of Mamas cooking, I have a couple of friends that I often consult for advice on some of the recipes. I trust their words of wisdom as they are accomplished Southern cooks in my opinion. I listen carefully whenever I can engage them into talking about cooking at home. They're wise in so many ways and it saddens me to think of all the wisdom that leaves us way too soon and way too often.

Saving those recipes is the point and purpose behind Taste of Southern. I'm trying to keep the old favorites, and a few that I might not even consider a favorite... alive and cooking. I hope I succeed.

So, armed with what I've just shared, are you ready to try some Mustard Greens? Don't let me totally discourage you from trying them yourself. I understand that there are actually people on this earth that DO like greens. I've admitted that I keep trying.

You'll find numerous and various ways to cook greens, this is just the way I prefer. If you're ready to cook up a "mess of greens" of your own, let's fill the sink with some water, grab a bunch or two of greens, and... Let's Get Cooking.



SOUTHERN MUSTARD GREENS

Southern Mustard Greens Recipe:



Mustard Greens: You'll need these ingredients.



Wash, wash, and wash again.

Your Mustard Greens will need to be washed if you buy them fresh or pick them from your garden. Dirt, sand, and even small bugs have a tendency to be attracted to greens. It's pretty simple to get them clean though, so not to worry. Just wash them enough to remove any grit so you're not feeling that between your teeth after they're cooked.

I have two bunches of greens today, and I've tossed them into the sink. While filling the sink with cold water, sprinkle a couple of Tablespoons of salt in the water. The salt will kill any bugs that might be hiding on the leaves and they'll fall to the bottom of the sink as you wash the greens.

Greens purchased fresh from the grocery store, roadside stand, or even the Farmer's Market, have likely been washed at least once or twice already. Still, you'll need to wash them at least once more before cooking them, just to be on the safe side.



As you swish them around in the water, look for any large and tough stems that might be included. I like to remove those and discard them. They will be stringy and tough unless you just like to cook your greens down to mush.

Some folks strip all the stems away to begin with. It's your choice if you'd prefer to do that. They do contain a lot of flavor so I just remove the larger ones and leave the smaller ones.



Jump in with both hands and toss them around in the water. Swirl them around really good each time you wash them.



Inspect the leaves. On my last wash, I will generally pick up and inspect most of the larger leaves, looking for anything that might be hidden. Don't worry about any holes you might find. Bugs do get on the leaves and will eat small holes through some of them. It's not anything to be concerned about, so just rinse the leaf well and place it in a large bowl.



This is my water after washing them the first time. Not bad, but it's stuff that will not be in the finished greens after they're cooked.

I knew these greens had already been washed pretty good to begin with, but as you can see, they still had some grit and grime on them. I saw a few small bug holes in some of the leaves, but didn't see any bugs. Smile.



On the last wash, I inspect most of the larger leaves pretty carefully. Then, swishing them around in the water one more time, I lift them out of the water and gently shake off the excess water. It took a few minutes, but I figured it was worth the extra effort to insure they don't have any secret things lurking around on the leaves.

It's hard to tell, but I placed them in a large stainless steel mixing bowl that just does fit into my sink. Keep this photo in mind as you read on down. You might be surprised at how much this big bowl of greens will wilt down once cooked.



I didn't find a lot of large stems, but I did remove a few. I also found a couple of brown stems that I pulled out. These pieces will be discarded.



This is about one third of the washed greens in this pot. I could have used a larger pot, but I know they're going to cook down, so I'll just add more as they wilt down a bit.

Place the greens in a fairly large stock pot and set that on your stove top. Turn the heat on Medium.

You can add about a cup of water at this point, but the greens will produce water as they cook. Either way, we're going to be throwing this water away once they cook down.



As the greens begin to wilt down, stir them around a bit to bring the one's from the bottom of the pot up to the top.

Add more greens as you have space in the pot until all of the greens have been added.

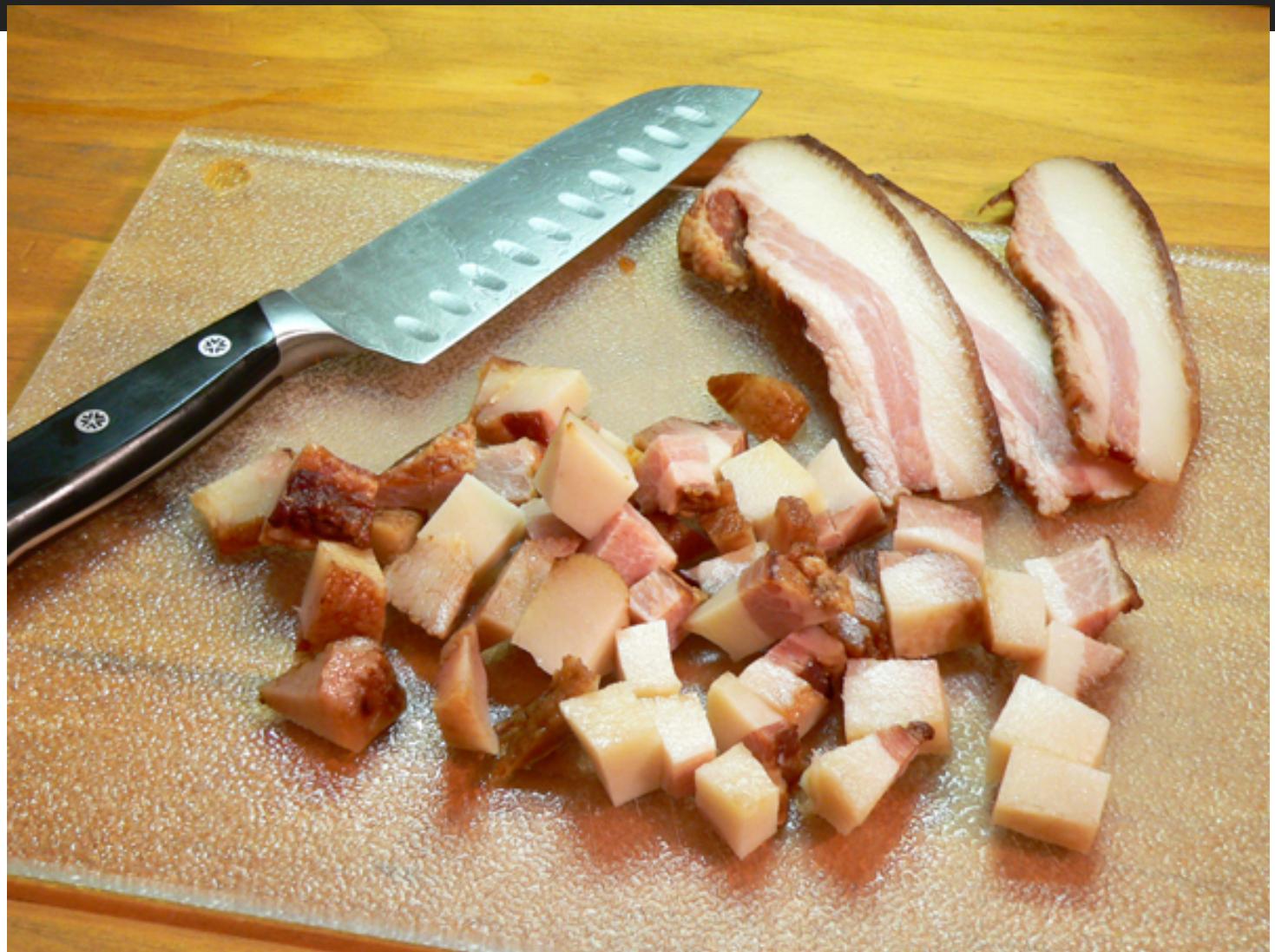


You can already see that the greens have cooked down quite a bit. Once they're all in the pot and wilted down, I like to add a teaspoon of sugar. Mama always did, and I always feel like I need to as well. Don't fault me for that... okay?

The sugar helps cut back on some of the bitterness of the greens.

I leave the pot uncovered and just let the greens simmer a bit. Just make sure you have a little water in the bottom so they don't dry up and burn.

Let the greens continue to cook while you prepare the rest of the ingredients. It will not hurt to let them simmer for about 15-20 minutes from this point, or even longer.



Prepare your seasoning meat of choice.

I had a chunk of Hog Jowl leftover from my New Years Day Meal, and decided to use it in the Mustard Greens. You could use side meat, ham, bacon, ham hocks or even smoked turkey meat if desired. Just use what you have on hand or what is the cheapest at the grocery store.

I sliced off three pieces of the hog jowl and will fry those up for later. I cubed the remaining piece of the hog jowl to add to the greens. I'll be using a little more than 1/4 lb. of seasoning meat, but you could use more if you like. Make it your own.



Chop the onions.

Don't cut them up too small because they'll cook and burn too quickly in the step down below.



The greens simmered for about 20 minutes. Take them off the heat and pour them into a colander. Drain all the liquid and just let it go down the drain. I don't consider this to be the "pot-liker" so many folks refer to. Just discard it.



Remember all those fresh greens we started out with? This is what they look like cooked down. Not a lot, but plenty for a good meal for several people.

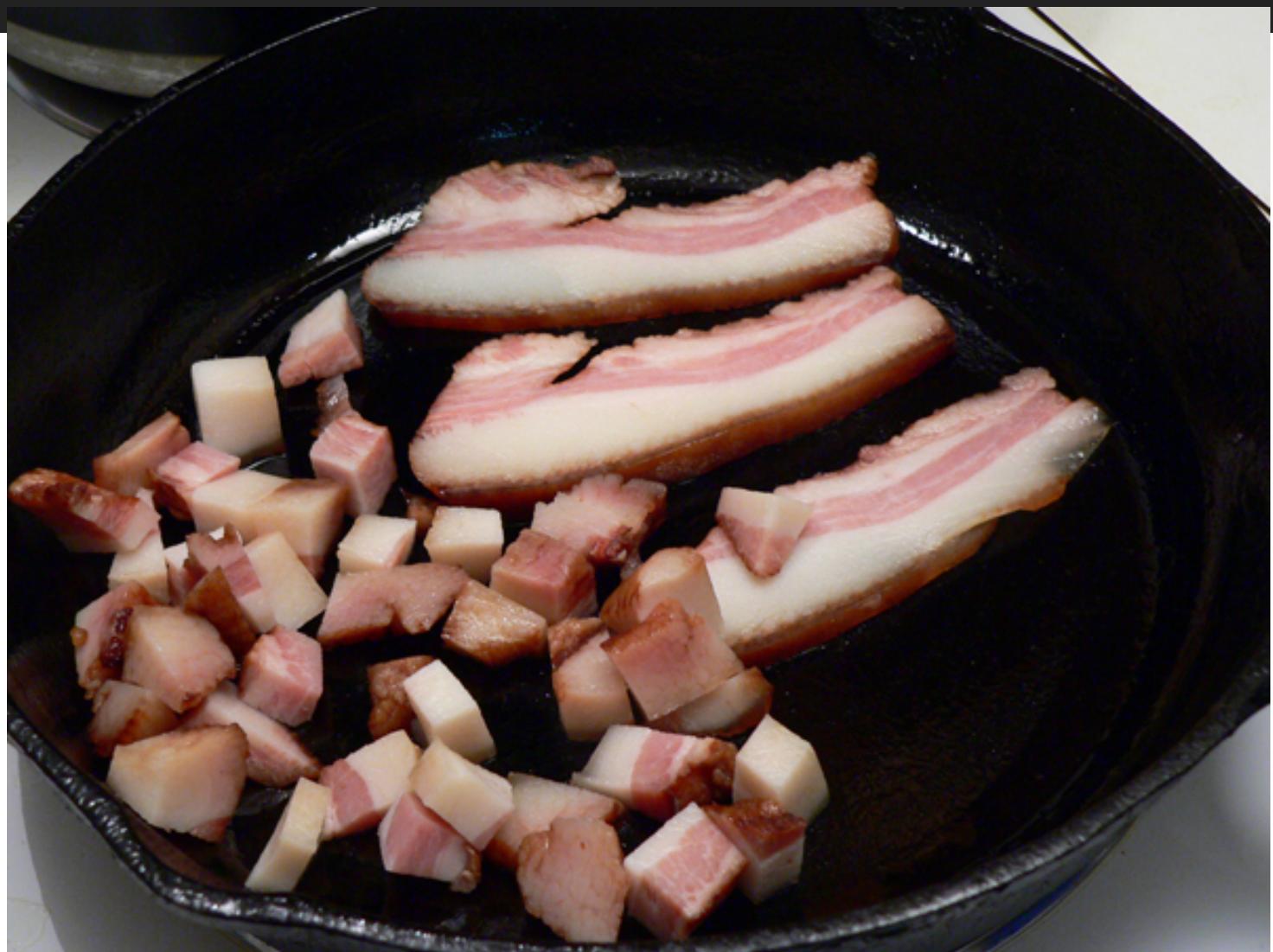
At this point, the greens could be allowed to cool and then frozen for cooking later. It's a bit more cooking than just being blanched, but greens need to cook a good bit anyway, so freezing them at this point would work well.



I opted to chop the greens after cooking them.

Looking back, I think it would have been better to have cut them up with a knife once they were washed and drain. Many people prefer to do it that way and it probably works a bit better. The greens were still a bit tough at this point and it made for some hard chopping to get through the thicker stems. It also left a few longer stems, which in turn had strings and weren't as pleasing to the mouth as they might have been had they been sliced into smaller pieces before being cooked.

Do it either way you like. Maybe my chopper is just getting dull. Set the greens aside for the moment.



Place your favorite cast iron skillet over Medium heat on your stove top.

Add your choice of seasoning meat to the pan once it's heated. We're going to let this brown a bit. I'm also cooking my slices of hog jowl at the same time. I'll remove it later. Stir the meat around as it cooks and don't let it burn.



Once the meat is lightly browned, toss the chopped onions into the skillet right on top of them.

The meat just needs to be slightly brown when you add the onions. We'll let it all cook together for awhile.



The hog jowl produced a good amount of grease as it cooked. This is good, as the onions don't burn so easily with a bit more grease in the pan.

Onions need to cook until tender and slightly translucent. This could take about 10 minutes, so if the meat had overcooked, it would be hard little pieces after all this time in the skillet. The onions are fairly tender at this point and the meat is still tender as well.

I took a spoon and scooped out just about all of the excess oil at this point. I don't need it, so it went in the grease container that stays near the stove.



Give everything a good stir and just let it cook a little bit longer.



Place the mustard greens in the skillet, right on top of the browned meat and the tender onions.

I had just enough to fill the skillet.



Next, add about 1-1/2 cups of water. I used water straight out of the tap and poured it in the skillet with the greens.

Chicken broth could be added instead of water. You might like to try that some time.



Let the water heat up to a slight simmer.

Cover the skillet.

REDUCE the heat down a notch or two, and let the greens simmer for 10 minutes.



After about 10 minutes, remove the lid and stir everything around a bit.

Taste the greens at this point to see if they need some salt. You may decide you don't need any at all, depending on the flavor from the type of seasoning meat that you used. Salt lightly at this point, you can add more later if need be.



I also add about 1/4 teaspoon of Black Pepper to the skillet. Add it if you like it.



Give everything a good stir to mix in the salt and pepper.

Cover the skillet again, and let the greens simmer for another 20-30 minutes, or until the greens are as tender as you'd like them. We all have different tastes, so you can cook them much longer if that's the way you like them. The stems will take the longest to cook down until tender.

Most of the older Southern cooks let greens cook for hours. Just keep a watch on them to make sure they have liquid left in the skillet. You could add more liquid if you'd like. This liquid from the final cooking is a prized part of most cooked greens dishes. We call it pot-licker and it's good poured over a big piece of cornbread.

Some folks just pour the liquid into a coffee cup, crumble up some corn bread in the cup, and drink it. There really wasn't much liquid in the skillet once my greens had cooked down. Other cooking methods might produce more of the liquid if that's what you're after.

Continue to simmer the greens, covered, until they are to your liking.



Enjoy!