



Eat Your Greens

Mediterranean cuisine offers a delicious way to reduce risk of disease and get more energy

By Elaine Gavalas

Long ago, around 600 BCE, a renowned ashram thrived along the Mediterranean coast in southern Italy. Just as at today's ashrams, the ancient devotees spent their time absorbed in deep meditation, stretching exercises, and studies of self-knowledge. Their vegetarian diet consisted of pure foods including fresh raw or cooked vegetables, herbs, whole grains, and fruits.

The founder of this ashram, however, was not a yogi from India; he was Pythagoras, the ancient Greek spiritual master who studied in the East with Egyptian sages and Indian rishis (sages) and

who brought this knowledge back to the western world. Although Pythagoras is best-known for his mathematical theorems, much of his influential teachings were linked to yogic and Egyptian spiritual mysteries.

The ancient influence of Pythagoras' dietary guidelines lives on in traditional Mediterranean cuisine. Epitomizing the ideal yogic diet, it contains sattvic (pure) foods that promote the body's prana (life-force) energy. Research shows that the Mediterranean diet lowers the risk of heart disease, cancer, obesity, hormonal imbalances, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

The heart of sattvic Mediterranean cuisine includes wild, gathered, earthy greens—such as dandelions, spinach, arugula, kale, escarole, fennel, and purslane—either served raw or lightly cooked and dressed with olive oil and fresh lemon juice. Fragrant herbs such as flat-leaved parsley, oregano, basil, rosemary, sage,

PYTHAGOREAN GREENS

Legend has it that Pythagoras and his yogis ate lightly cooked greens gathered from the hillsides. Enjoy your greens with some olives and a slice of whole-grain country bread.

Ingredients:

2 cups of spring or filtered water
pinch of salt
about 1 pound of dark leafy greens
 (preferably wild-gathered), such as dandelions, arugula, spinach, escarole, and/or kale, washed and coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Directions:

1. In a medium saucepan, bring water and salt to a boil over high heat. Add the greens, cover, and return to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes, or until the greens are wilted.
2. Spoon the greens into a serving bowl, and add some of the reserved cooking liquid. Drizzle with olive oil, and season with lemon juice.
3. Garnish with sliced zucchini and serve with olives and a wedge of hearty country bread.

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Yoga 101

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Krishna tells Arjuna about the importance of finding a guru: “Acquire the transcendental knowledge from a Self-realized master by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry, and by service,” he says. “The wise ones who have realized the Truth will impart the Knowledge to you.” As the book goes on, it becomes clear that the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna is, in fact, an example of the student/guru path, with Krishna representing the guru and Arjuna, his student.

People who want to incorporate the idea of a guru into their yoga practice can try Guru Yoga. This form of yoga doesn't incorporate physical postures but involves giving gratitude and thanks for your teachers. Remember, yoga means union, so Guru Yoga is really “union with the nature of the guru,” and it's believed that practicing it helps us to blend our own minds with the guru's mind.

You don't have to look very far to see Guru Yoga in action. One of the most popular bands of all times, the Beatles, praise the guru in their song *Across the Universe*. In this classic tune, John Lennon—who studied with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi—sings “Jai Guru Deva” in the chorus. *Jai* means “praise,” or “thank you”; *Guru Dev* is a name of Maharishi's teacher. So in the song, Lennon practices Guru Yoga by thanking his lineage of teachers for passing down knowledge through the generations.

Although the idea of a guru has changed over time, it remains an important concept that continues to be passed on—and probably always will be, as long as spiritual curiosity and wonder exist. 


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Practical Magic

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your shoulder. Bring your arm back, and clasp the outside of your right foot, your thumb on the sole, fingers on the top. Once you have the foot, spin your body forward again and start to lift your right leg, turning your elbow to the ceiling as you bring your left arm up, bend at the elbow (triceps facing forward), and catch hold of the inner right foot.

I've always had my hand turned up the right way, but I would take it to the inside of my foot instead of the outside. This forced me to crank my shoulder around in a very uncomfortable way just to get my foot up behind me—and then I would lose my balance. If you place your hand on the outside of your foot, you can easily bring your right elbow back around, and your foot automatically lifts up behind you.

Once you're in this position, work on lifting your chest higher and bringing your foot towards your head as you arch back. If you're open enough in your hips, back, and shoulders, you will eventually be able to touch your foot to your head. Keep practicing, and continue to be open to the subtle changes. I can't imagine how many hours every day a prima ballerina or professional figure skater practices in order to perform with such ease and grace. As you continue to practice with proper preparation and precise placement, you too can create the most challenging, awe-inspiring asanas in the dance of your life. 

Kristen McGee has been teaching yoga since 1997. She has recently released a DVD for children, *Kristin McGee's Bendigirl Yoga*. Visit www.kristinmcgee.com for more information.

Yoga Pantry

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and thyme are also an integral part of the diet.


Other dishes fresh from the bountiful Mediterranean garden include crisp salads made with tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, onions, and local goat's-milk cheese. There are savory vegetable dishes of eggplants, tomatoes, zucchini, green beans, artichokes, peppers, onions, or garlic cooked in olive oil and seasoned with cinnamon and fresh herbs.

Favorite soups and stews contain lemony lentils and fava beans. Whole-grain fare includes hearty pastas of all sizes and shapes topped with ripe, red tomatoes and olive oil. All these dishes are often accompanied by fruity olives from local groves and home-baked, country-style breads drizzled with olive oil.

For dessert, the Mediterranean style keeps it simple and sweet: cooling, thick yogurt drizzled with local, sweet honey infused with wild herbs; and fresh, succulent fruits such as blood oranges, juicy melons, and sweet grapes.

So, savor the flavors, colors, textures, scents, and heart-healthy benefits of the Mediterranean diet. You can eat just as the ancient yogis did by adding some pure dishes to your diet.

We highly recommend the Pythagorean Greens, a mixture of leafy vegetables cooked lightly and inspired by the ancient Greek spiritual master himself.

(The recipe is on page 14.) 

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