

Summer greens with bitter bite too often ignored

By Emily Horton, Washington Post

A couple of years ago, I worked at a greenmarket for a farmer who grows the most glorious chicories: frisee, radicchio, escarole, puntarelle. They are bitter greens whose underlying sweetness is checked by a bite that can surprise you.

One spring, we had a customer who would buy seven heads of curly endive at a time; one for each day of the week, he said. If his purchases seemed excessive, I understood his fervor. Leafy greens anchor my cooking, no matter the time of year. Summer's offerings are a little harder to see for all the hysteria around the season's heirloom tomatoes, but they are worth pursuing – even if your appreciation of leafy vegetables strikes a more moderate tone than my own.

Cooking with greens in the hottest months of the year takes some rethinking. If you have your palate trained on winter's kale, collards, turnips and other cool-season leafy brassicas, summer's holdouts can be disillusioning. Though such cold-hardy greens will produce leaves in the heat if given enough shade and water, they aren't keen on it. You can taste their resistance in bitter, less-tender leaves that are no longer the center of the plant's attention.

Longer, warmer days trigger plants to launch into bolting: the process of sending out flowers and producing seeds. This switch in gears, explains Gerald Brust, vegetable specialist for the University of Maryland Extension, diverts enzymes and nutrients – flavor – away from the leaves and into the immediate, more important task of reproduction.

[Read the whole story](#)