

# ***Florida Food Fare***

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## **Bok Choy**

Bok choy is one of the oldest of the Chinese vegetables. A Chinese cabbage, bok choy has been cultivated in China since the fifth century A.D. and in the West since the mid-18th century. Some confusion continues, in spite of its ancient lineage, as to what bok choy really is. "Bok choy" simply means "white vegetable" in Cantonese. It resembles a cross between celery and green Swiss Chard white celery-like stalks topped with deep green leaves.

Bok choy is grown in several Florida locations as a minor or specialty crop, primarily during the winter months. Among the mildest, most versatile, and prettiest of the myriad members of the Crucifer family, bok choy extends into attractive, very large dark green leaves. Having long thick white stalks, this rather distinguished vegetable is quite juicy and its crunchy stalks have a sweet but slightly sharp, taste that reminds one of delicately flavored cabbage.

Good quality bok choy should exhibit clean, crisp stalks and fresh-looking leaves. Avoid wilted or significantly discolored leaves. To store, place unwashed bok choy in a perforated plastic bag or wrap loosely in a brown paper bag, or in paper towels. Refrigerate in crisper drawer for only one or two days, as this vegetable is best used immediately. Wash bok choy thoroughly to remove any sandy grit; drain well.

Bok choy, like other cabbages, is rich in vitamin C, and a good source of vitamin A and calcium. One-half cup has only about 15 calories. High in fiber, bok choy is ideal roughage to aid digestion. Bok choy is normally cooked (stir-fried as a side dish or added to soups). It

is excellent boiled or steamed. Diced bok choy makes a perfect flavor and texture addition to stir-fries, braises, soups, and steamed dishes. Its subtle flavor blends well with poultry, beef, shellfish, lamb, pork, or is superb just by itself.

**Recipe:**

**Bok choy au gratin**

1 1/2 pounds fresh bok choy	1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 cup shredded low fat Swiss cheese (2 ounces)	1 tablespoon or butter, melted
2 tablespoon butter	1 cup fat free half-and-half
1 tablespoon all purpose flour	2 tablespoons fine dry bread crumbs
1/4 teaspoon salt	

Wash bok choy well and cut off leaves and save. Cut stems into 1/4 inch slices. Cut leaves into 1/2 inch strips. Drain thoroughly. Place bok choy in ungreased rectangular pan 10 by 6 by 1 inch or square 8- by 8 by 2-inch pan. Sprinkle-with cheese.

Heat 1 tablespoon butter in 1 quart saucepan over low heat until melted (or microwave). Stir in flour, salt and nutmeg. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until smooth and bubbly. Remove from heat. Stir in half-and-half. Heat to boiling, stirring constantly. Boil and stir 1 minute. Pour over bok choy. Mix bread crumbs and 1 tablespoon melted butter. Sprinkle over bok choy. Set oven control to broil or at 550 F. Broil with top about 4 inches from heat until golden brown and bubbly, 3-5 minutes. Serves 6.