



Freshest Creamed Spinach

SERVES 4

- 12 oz** baby spinach (about 8 cups loose)
- 1 clove** garlic
- 1 Tbs** pesto (optional)
- 1** medium shallot
- 2 Tbs** flour
- 2 Tbs** butter
- 1/2 tsp** salt
- 1/4 tsp** nutmeg
- 1/3 cup** half-n-half or cream

Finely mince garlic and shallot and mix together. Place butter in a 4 quart pot over medium heat. As it melts, add shallot and garlic mixture and sauté in butter until soft and fragrant, about 1 minute. Add flour and stir with a small whisk until roux forms. Cook for another minute and then add cream, stirring until a sauce thickens and is smooth. The sauce will be very thick. Stir in the pesto, if desired.

Immediately add all the baby spinach, pressing it down into the pot and turning it over and under the sauce until it begins to wilt, about 4 minutes. The spinach will reduce greatly, shedding its liquid and adding to the sauce. Add the salt. Take off heat and continue to stir gently another minute. Sprinkle nutmeg over mixture and serve.

THE BEST WAY TO EAT CREAMED SPINACH IS RIGHT AFTER IT IS MADE.

The gloppy chalky version often served in steakhouses has often sat on a stove for hours and it is a far cry from this easy-to-prepare version, which can easily be made at the last moment. The milder flavor of the baby spinach is a better complement to this simple cream sauce than regular spinach, and it can be added right from the package without chopping, since most baby spinach is pre-washed.

CHOOSE YOUR AMOUNT OF DONENESS. As the spinach reduces it goes through stages from wilting to exuding its moisture to disintegrating into the sauce. You can choose what you like best, but for the freshest flavor, take it off the heat moment it has

finished wilting, when it still is recognizably leaves and has turned a bright green, and continue to stir. This finishes the dish perfectly, with the greens still having some bite.

THIS TECHNIQUE OF MAKING A QUICK ROUX WORKS WITH A VARIETY OF VEGETABLES.

Try it with frozen peas, or pearl onions (or mix them together!) You can add them right from the freezer, and cook them in the cream on low heat until they are done. Other veggies need to be gently poached to work well, but fennel, broccoli, or green beans will all taste great in this sauce, especially if you experiment with adding a small amount of other liquids such as lemon or orange juice, chicken stock, or even some of the poaching liquid since these veggies won't exude much of their own.