

“Now through the end of June is peak watercress season,” proclaims Linda Raper of Rogue Harbor Farm in North Carolina, where she and her husband have grown certified-organic watercress since 1997. Added to soups, salads, and sandwiches, watercress provides an impressive array of nutrients, including iron, vitamins A, B₂, B₆, C, and E, plus antioxidants lutein, zeaxanthin, and quercetin.

“Eat watercress and get wit.”
—ancient Greek proverb

How to buy and store

- “Look for vibrant green leaves, slightly crisp stems, and an overall ‘perky’ look,” advises Raper. “Leaf size doesn’t affect taste—it may vary from small to quarter-sized, depending upon growing conditions.” She also notes that the peppery flavor strengthens throughout the season, so April stems and leaves will be more tender and mild than June ones.
- When buying a bunch at a farmers’ market or grocery store, Raper recommends looking

- for “traceability—where the watercress came from and when it was harvested.”
- Wash leaves and pat dry, then trim stems ¼ inch. Store in a resealable plastic bag, or simply place stems in a glass of water like a flower bouquet. Watercress should remain fresh for four to five days in the refrigerator.
- “Don’t be afraid if white roots form,” says Raper. “That’s simply the watercress trying to grow.”

Chef’s secret
Use watercress like fresh basil in pesto, soups, sauces, and tomato salads.

