

Utica Greens

In Central New York, restaurants are often judged by the Utica greens they serve. This signature dish of my native city is a staple at Joey's—and a popular lunch with our regulars at the bar. I grew up on spicy Utica greens. Back in the day, I would often end an evening at one of Utica's late-night clubs with a diner breakfast of steak, eggs, and Utica greens.

Serves 6

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| 2 | heads escarole (about 2 pounds) |
| ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons | olive oil |
| ½ cup | sliced onion |
| ½ cup (4 ounces) | finely chopped pancetta—or half prosciutto and half cooked bacon |
| 5 | cloves garlic, thinly sliced |
| 3 | hot cherry peppers in vinegar, drained, stemmed, seeded, and chopped |
| ½ cup | Chicken Stock (page 54) |
| ½ cup | Seasoned Bread Crumbs (page 201) |
| | Salt and black pepper, to taste |
| ½ cup | grated Asiago cheese |

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Because escarole tends to be sandy, wash it thoroughly by filling the sink with cold water and swishing the leaves through the water. Drain the water from the sink and repeat the process twice more (or use prewashed escarole). Drain well and cut the escarole into 1-inch strips.

In a large pot, bring 6 quarts of salted water to a boil, add the escarole and blanch for 2 minutes. Drain the pot and plunge the escarole into an ice bath (4 cups cold water, 4 cups ice) to stop cooking. Drain thoroughly.

In a large skillet, heat ½ cup olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and pancetta and cook for 5 minutes to soften. Do not brown. Increase heat to medium-high, and add the garlic. Sauté until lightly browned, then add the escarole, peppers, and chicken broth.

Combine thoroughly and cook until escarole is wilted. Season with salt and pepper.

Transfer the mixture to a 2-quart baking dish. In small bowl, combine the bread crumbs with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Spread the moistened bread crumbs over the escarole, then sprinkle with Asiago. Bake until the cheese melts, about 15 minutes.



A Tip from Joey

Feel free to add your own signature touch to this dish, such as sliced, cooked Italian sausage or cubed Roasted Rosemary Potatoes (page 74).

