

**Top Ten**  
**Vegan**  
**Sources**  
of  
**Protein**  
**Calcium**  
and  
**Iron**

## **Introduction**

The key concept in any well-designed diet program or [calorie restriction](#) practice is to get the most nutritional bang for the caloric buck. When you're limiting your calorie intake, it's important to ensure each and every unit of energy comes packed with all the vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients possible.

The lists that follow rank common, whole foods according to their nutrient-to-calorie ratios, in accordance with [Dr. Fuhrman's](#) Eat To Live equation:

$$Health = N/C$$

Additionally, the high water and fiber content of fruits and vegetables makes them quite filling, a concept researcher Barbara Rolls coined [Volumetrics](#).

While there may exist some choices that could technically be placed higher, they're often either exotic ingredients or are consumed in such minute amount as to be impractical or unappetizing in quantity. For example, many dried herbs and spices are excellent sources of iron and calcium, but you wouldn't exactly want to consume an ounce or more of dried basil. Others, like [butterbur](#), are primarily used medicinally and may even be toxic if consumed in quantity.

Note: Where ranges are given, its the preparation (raw vs cooked, etc.) that's responsible for the uncertainty. Interestingly enough, the boiled form often comes out the winner. In any case, the upper value is used for the ranking.

# PROTEIN

(g/cal)

**spirulina**

(0.20 - 0.23)

**watercress**

(0.21)

**tofu**

(0.13 - 0.18)

**alfalfa sprouts**

(0.17)

**asparagus**

(0.13 - 0.16)

**mustard greens**

(0.15)

**broccoli raab, aka rapini**

(0.14)

**mushrooms, white and portabello**

(0.12 - 0.14)

**peanuts**

(0.13 - 0.14)

**Chinese cabbage, aka pak-choi**

(0.13)

## Honorable Mentions (Protein)

Spinach  
(0.12 – 0.13)

Notice, while a couple legumes (soy and peanuts) made the list, the majority are leafy greens. This may come as a surprise to many people. Yes, beans are high in protein, but they don't fare as well on a per-calorie basis. Looks like Popeye was right!



*If you decide to add protein powders to your staple of whole foods, make sure they are of the highest quality, avoiding those processed with harsh chemicals and extreme heat. An example meeting this standard is [SunWarrior](#) (0.23).*

# CALCIUM

(mg/cal)

## **watercress**

(10.91)

## **mustard greens**

(4.93 - 9.88)

## **epazote**

(8.59)

## **turnip greens**

(5.24 - 8.43)

## **Chinese cabbage, aka pak-choi**

(8.08)

## **lambsquarters**

(7.19 - 8.06)

## **arugula**

(6.40)

## **collard greens**

(5.38 - 6.09)

## **spinach**

(5.00 - 5.91)

## **beet greens**

(5.32)

## Honorable Mentions (Calcium)

Tofu ranks quite highly, *if prepared using calcium sulfate*. However, that's kind of cheating, isn't it? You might as well be supplementing, if your food source gets its bragging rights via fortification!

# IRON

(mg/cal)

**unsweetened cocoa powder**

(0.07 - 0.18)

**parsley**

(0.17)

**spinach**

(0.12 - 0.16)

**beet greens**

(0.12)

**swiss chard**

(0.09 - 0.11)

**spirulina**

(0.11)

**canned tomato products**

(0.11)

**broccoli raab, aka rapini**

(0.10)

**asparagus**

(0.09 - 0.10)

**lettuce, butterhead/Boston/Bibb**

(0.10)

## Honorable Mentions (Iron)

Chinese cabbage, aka pak-choi  
(0.09)

potatoes with skins  
(0.08)

tofu  
(0.07)

dried fruits, such as apricots, prunes, and raisins  
(0.01 - 0.03)

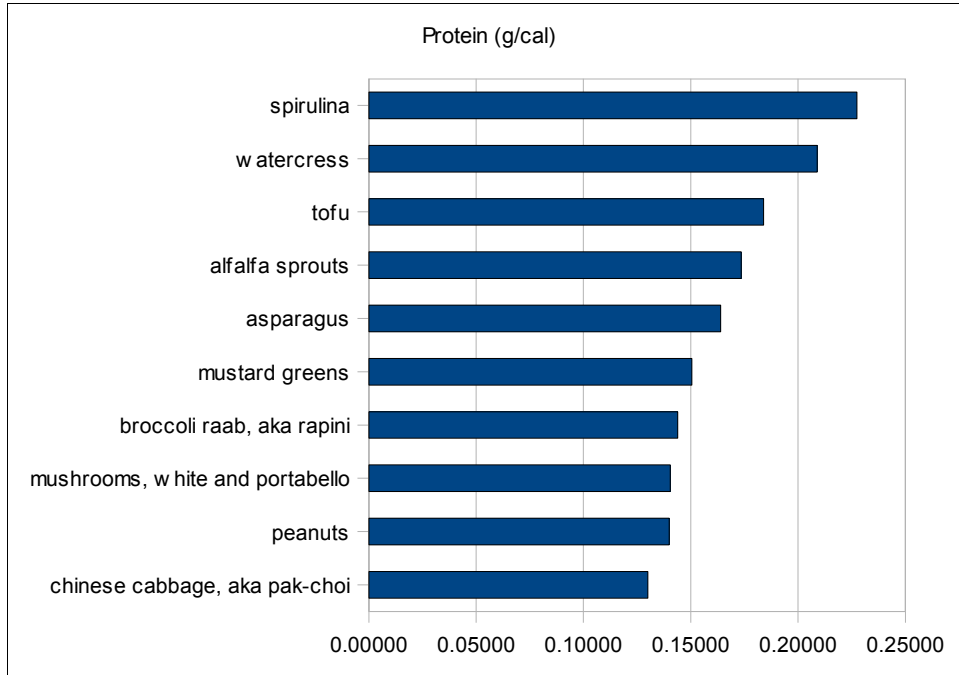
molasses  
(0.02)

OK, so those last two aren't any great shakes. I just have a soft spot for sweets.

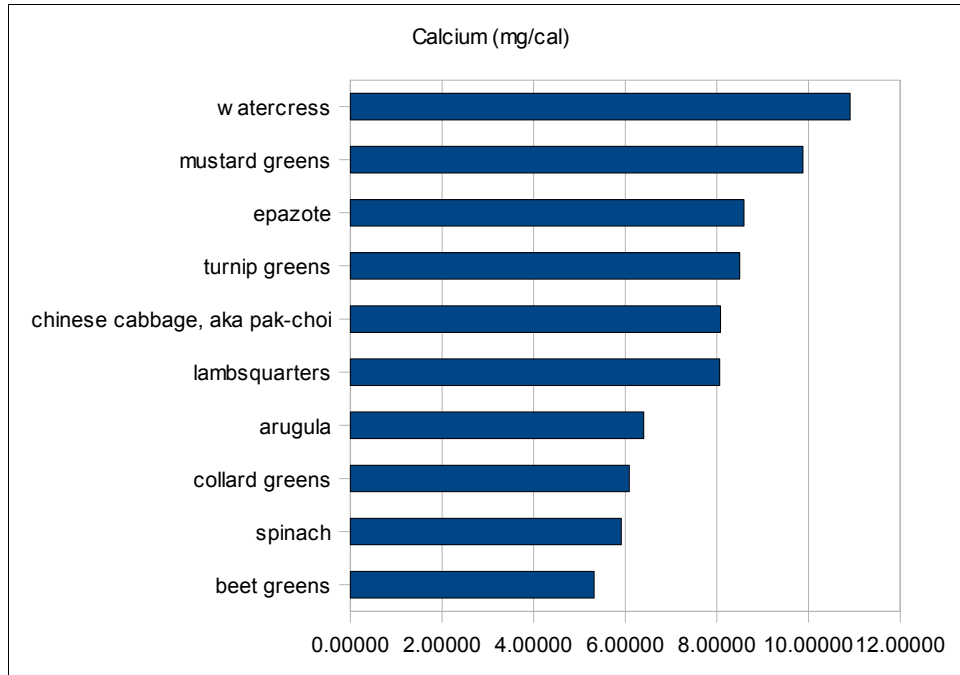


## Charts (3 1/2" x 5")

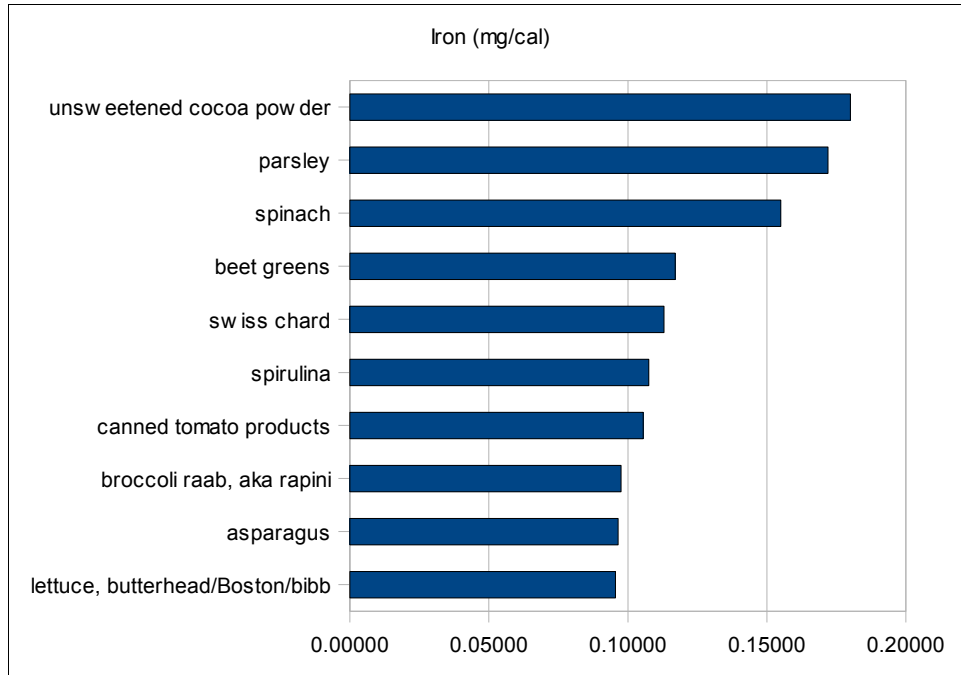
The following graphs, one for each Top 10 list, have been sized to fit a standard index card so they may be easily carried to the grocery store or farmer's market.



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## Closing Thoughts

Chinese cabbage and spinach both did extremely well in this analysis. Each just barely failed to make all three lists, with 11<sup>th</sup> place finishes in iron and protein, respectively. Impressive.

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To create these rankings, I compiled numbers from the USDA's latest database at the time of this writing, SR20, accessed via <http://www.nutritiondata.com>. Any apparent ties are due to rounding. The position of one over the other reflects the actual, ridiculously precise measures.

I hope you've found this report enlightening and that it will continue to serve as a helpful reference. For more on vegan nutrition and to receive updates and specials, including coupon codes for readers only, subscribe to my newsletter at:

<http://www.vegandonelight.com>

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