

How to grow Swiss chard

Swiss Chard (*Beta Vulgaris*)

Family: Chenopodiaceae (Goosefoot)

Hardiness: Hardy

Nutrient needs: Medium

Water needs: High

Ease of growing: Easy

Common propagation: Seed

Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 50°F to 85°F

Germination time: 5 to 21 days

Viability: 5 years

Direct sow: mid-April to mid-July

Transplants

Weeks to grow transplants: 4 to 6

Start: March to June

Plant out: May to August

Planning facts

Spacing for baby greens: 1" apart

Spacing for larger leaves: 6" x 18"

Plants per square foot: 4 to 16

Time to harvest: 30 to 60 days from seed

Variety selection

Swiss chard is very closely related to beets and in the same family as spinach. Cultivars vary in the color of their leaves and their midribs. Leaves can be green to red, while midribs can be white, red, or yellow. Some varieties are so attractive that people include them in their ornamental gardens. Fordhook Giant is the most well-known green variety and works well for both baby and

bunching greens. More colorful varieties with bright red petioles include Ruby Red.

Preparation and planting

Grow Swiss chard as a summer substitute for spinach. It is slow to bolt and can stay in the ground right through the hottest part of the summer, faithfully producing succulent leaves. Direct seeding is the most common way to start chard, but you can also use transplants to get an earlier start on the season.

Care

Swiss chard's needs are similar to beets. If grown on poor soils, the plants will benefit from a midseason nitrogen application; otherwise, they perform well with little or no fertilizer. Keep the soil moist. Plants that become drought-stressed are more likely to produce a flower stalk and stop leaf production.

Major pests

Insects: Flea beetles, aphids, European corn borer, leaf miners slugs.

Diseases: Downy mildew and fungal leaf blights.

Harvesting and storage

Harvest the outer leaves and avoid damaging the inner ones. Keep in mind that the younger leaves are the tastiest, so harvest before leaves get too big. If the plant isn't damaged, harvesting can continue for up to two years. Store as you would other greens; wash them, bag them and place them in the crisper of your refrigerator.

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