



All About: CHARD

Chard is a beautiful and versatile cooking green that can grace your garden from spring through fall. Often called “Swiss chard,” this underappreciated vegetable actually hails from the Mediterranean. If chard’s beauty and adaptability don’t convince you to raise some, maybe its nutritional content will! In a 1 cup (cooked) serving, chard packs a punch with these approximate daily values of nutrients:

- Vitamin K – 700%
- Vitamin A – 200%
- Vitamin C – 50%
- Vitamin E – 20%
- Magnesium – 30%
- Potassium – 25%
- Iron – 20%
- Calcium – 10%
- Fiber – 15%

It’s also good to know that chard is high in antioxidants (the good stuff!) and has slightly high sodium, for a vegetable, at 13% of the daily value.

Planting

To grow chard, you can seed it directly anytime from spring through late summer. It prefers moderate temperatures, but often continues to thrive when the weather takes a more extreme turn. If you want to give it a head start in the spring, purchase seedlings or grow your own to transplant as early as the end of March.

Unlike most cooking greens, chard is in the beet family. It does not, however, grow an edible root crop like the beet. Like beets, chard is multi-embryonic, which simply means that one seed may sprout several plants. This capability usually means good germination rates. It also means that thinning is an appropriate management plan! To thin, simply trim away some of the plants to create optimal spacing.

Chard needs about 6-12" per plant, if you are planning to harvest the leaves large, as a cooking green. If you like the flavor of raw chard, the leaves are more palatable when they are young and tender. To seed for salad greens, place seeds about an inch apart.

Varieties

Here are some of our favorites:

- Bright Lights – a rainbow of stem colors and dark green leaves
- Fordhook Giant – open-pollinated variety, large leaves with white stems
- Ruby Red – deep red stalks with dark green leaves

Maintaining

Chard, like most vegetables, prefers a loamy rich soil with pH between 6.0 and 7.0. But it will grow in many different conditions. If your soil quality is not great, consider adding compost and/or fertilizing with some seaweed and fish emulsion. Mulching with straw or dried leaves helps maintain soil moisture.

Depending on the weather conditions, chard may survive over the winter. The leaves often remain tasty (though slow to regrow) throughout the winter, but as spring warms, they may turn bitter as the plant directs its energy into producing seeds. For the most delicious, mild chard, sow new plants each year.

Harvesting

Chard will continue to produce throughout the growing season, if it is harvested correctly. It is ready to harvest when the leaves are the size you prefer.

To harvest large leaves for cooking greens, pull or cut the oldest, largest leaves from the outside of the plant. New leaves are formed in the interior of the plant. Be careful not to damage these tender, smaller leaves, and your chard will reward you with continued production!

We like to harvest by simply placing our thumb on the inside of the stem of a leaf, where it attaches to the plant. Twist and pull, and the leaf should easily come off of the plant. If you have difficulty removing a leaf in this manner, use a pruner or sharp scissors to cut the leaf from the plant, as low on the stem as possible. Don't harvest more than half of the chard's leaves at a time, so the plant has a chance to continue growing and making food for itself.

To harvest small leaves for salad greens, either pick individual leaves, or use a scissors to cut many leaves at once. If you use the scissors method, be sure to leave the tiny center leaves in each plant to regrow.

Pests

The bad news: many varieties of beetles like to munch on chard leaves. Also, slugs can eat large holes in the leaves. Some mining insect pests eat into the leaves and make little dark holes on the

chard stems. If you see spiraled tunnels in the leaves, trim off that part of the leaf and discard. The good news, however, is that insect damage is rarely severe enough to hinder the plant's growth. Cosmetic damage is just that - especially if you are harvesting for cooking greens. Once the greens are cooked, no one will be the wiser that there were holes in the leaves!

Recipes

Chard can be used in place of spinach in any cooked recipe. For a quick, tasty side dish, sauté chopped chard in olive oil with garlic and onions, until soft. Add the stems to the pan first, as they take longer than the leaves to cook. Here are [a few more ideas](#). Have a favorite chard recipe? Let us know and we'll post it for all to try!