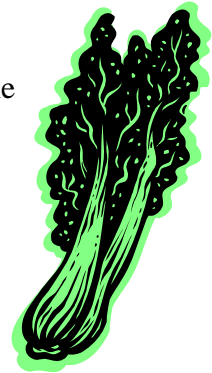


Warm Season Greens Offer Nutrition

Greens are some of the most nutritious vegetables that can be grown in the home vegetable garden, and June is the month to plant them. Though some nutrients are lost when cooking, most greens contain significant amounts of vitamins A and C and minerals like calcium, phosphorus, potassium and iron. Swiss chard is the most popular summer potherb. It belongs to the same genus and species as beets, but it's leafier and has enlarged midribs.



Early plant development is similar for Swiss chard and beets. Both form a loose rosette of leaves. However, beetroots soon swell and leaf production slows, while Swiss chard leaf production continues vigorously throughout the summer. Beet greens are most tender when plants are young. Older leaves tend to be tough. Swiss chard leaves remain tender throughout the growing season, although they taste best just after expanding. Try removing the leaf blade to steam midribs like asparagus.

'Lucullus' is the traditional Swiss chard variety of choice. Its leaves are light green, broad and curly and it has large midribs. To add color to meals and the garden, try 'Rhubarb' chard, which has bright red midribs, or try the lighter 'Pink Passion'. New Zealand spinach is another excellent warm-season green. An excellent source of vitamins A and C, its flavor is similar to spinach, though less astringent. Low-growing viny plants can reach a diameter of 3 to 4 feet. Triangular, dark green succulent leaves occur on multi-stemmed branches. Harvest young branch tips and leaves and boil or steam them like spinach. Frequent harvesting encourages plant bushiness and greater production. To improve germination, soak seed of New Zealand spinach in water for a couple of hours. Plant seed 1 inch deep and 4 to 6 inches apart in the row. After emergence, thin seedlings 12 to 18 inches apart.

Other minor potherbs that can be grown in warmer weather include 'Malabar' spinach and 'Tampala' or Chinese spinach. The twining vines of 'Malabar' spinach produce abundant fleshy leaves with a mushier texture than spinach when cooked. The taste is similar to Swiss chard. 'Tampala' is a vegetable-type amaranth that makes an acceptable cooked green.

Some weeds can also be a source of cooked greens. Tie up dandelions during the second year of growth to promote blanching, then cut below the whorl of leaves to reduce bitterness. The young leaves of lamb's quarter make an excellent cooked green, as does purslane. The thick, prostrate stems and leaves of purslane are often eaten raw or sauted in a frying pan with pieces of bacon. Herbs that are occasionally used for greens include borage, chicory, arugula (for stir fry), comfrey and salad burnet.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact Ken Churches at cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu or (209) 754-6475 with your agricultural questions. To speak with a Certified Master Gardener: Calaveras (209) 754-2880, Tuolumne (209) 533-5696, Amador (209) 223-6837, El Dorado (530) 621-5543.