

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION



Swiss Chard Growing Guide

Collin County Master Gardeners Association

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Swiss Chard (*Beta vulgaris*) is a leafy green vegetable with stems that are an amazing array of colors and is quite ornamental. It is a cool season plant, and the leaves are tender and tasty when the weather is cool. Plants will often survive summer heat but the leaves can become tough. Swiss Chard will tolerate frost but not a hard freeze.

It is best planted in North Texas in late winter or early spring, and again in September for a fall crop. Choose a site that provides at least eight hours of direct sun each day. Swiss Chard can tolerate as little as five to six hours of direct sun without taste or production being affected.

Swiss Chard can be planted by direct seeding in the garden, or grown as transplants and set out. Soil should be rich and well drained. Add a generous amount of compost or other organic matter to the planting site and work two teaspoons a well balanced fertilizer per square foot into the soil prior to planting.

To improve seedling germination, soak the seed in water overnight in room temperature water. Sow seed 1" apart and 1" deep in soil that has been turned and raked smooth. Water gently and carefully and keep the soil moist until the seeds germinate. Transplants should be placed 4-6" apart in holes that are the same size as the existing root ball.

When the seeds have germinated (they may take 2-3 weeks in cool soil, but only 5-7 days in warm soil), reduce the frequency of watering gradually so the plants get tougher. Thin seedlings to 4-6" apart by clipping the extras at the soil line (don't pull out the seedlings as they may affect the root system of the nearby seedlings).

Swiss Chard is ready to harvest in 35-40 days from germination, but tender leaves can be harvested as needed at any time. Harvest early in the morning when leaves are turgid (filled with water). Cut the plant at the base, wash and prepare or refrigerate immediately. Stalks and leaves can be frozen for later use.

The secrets to growing Swiss Chard are cool temperatures, adequate water and high fertility. When plants are 6" tall fertilize with ½ cup of high nitrogen fertilizer lightly worked into the soil and then watered in.

Swiss Chard is good for you. It has just 7 calories per 1-cup serving, but the nutrient-packed greens are a very good source of dietary fiber, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin E (Alpha Tocopherol), Vitamin K, Riboflavin, Vitamin B6, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, copper and manganese. In cooking, the leaves are generally removed from the stalk; stalks are edible but require longer cooking. Leaves can be eaten raw or cooked, but are less bitter cooked. Try them lightly sautéed in butter with chopped garlic and crushed red pepper. Add the leaves to soups, stews, pasta and any other dishes that would benefit from these nutritious greens. Yum!