

The best time of the day to harvest green is during the cool part of the morning. Refrigerate or process as soon as possible.

- Wash greens in cool running water and shake to remove excess moisture before use. It is important to remove any soil that is clinging to the leaves.
- To preserve the most nutrients in the greens, cook quickly with as little water as possible. This can be done in a microwave oven or a steamer. Greens can be sautéed, too.
- Cook greens about 1 to 3 minutes, until they just wilt.
- If greens require a long cooking time to be edible, they were picked when overly mature.
- Swiss chard and spinach can be used raw in salads if the leaves are small.
- If, very late in the season chard is picked, sometimes leaves are too tough to cook. Cut them away and cook just the stems.
- When using spinach, there is more flavor in the stems than the leaves. Be sure not to discard stems. Cook them together.

For more information and other helpful educational materials, contact:

Gretchen Voyle, Horticulture Educator
MSU Extension - Livingston County
2300 East Grand River Avenue, Suite 111
Howell, MI 48843

517-546-9850 Fax: 517-546-5154
<http://co.livingston.mi.us/msuextension>

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.

S:\shared\G Voyle\MSU Brochures\greentips\growinggreens rev121508 kaw

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Green Tips

Plant and Grow Guides

Growin' Greens (GT 106)

Greens are vegetable leaves and stems that can be used for cooking and salads. These vegetables include Swiss chard, spinach, kale, collards and mustard greens. Turnips and beets also produce roots that can be eaten. All are high in vitamins and minerals and are easy to grow. All of these plants will benefit from being mulched.

Swiss chard-belongs to the beet family but does not develop a root that is eaten. Leaves and stems can be harvested all summer. Leaves



are a glossy green and wrinkled. Stems and veins can be white, yellow or red, depending on the variety. Small leaves and stems can be eaten raw but larger leaves should be cooked. Leaves grow in rosettes and it is possible to pick just outer leaves and keep plants for most of the season. Cut or break leaves about one inch from the ground when removing leaves.

Sometimes, small belishes on the stems of white and yellow chard will appear brown. It is much less noticeable on red chard. The optimum soil temperature for seeding is 50 - 85 degrees F.

Spinach-is a cool season annual and will grow in partial shade. There are two types of spinach., smooth leaf and Savoy which has crinkled leaves. The smooth leaf spinach is preferred by many because it is easier to clean. Sow spinach as early as the soil can be worked in the spring. Spinach is slow to germinate and grow. It can also be grown as a late fall crop.

Kale-does best as a fall crop and its flavor is improved by light frosts. Plants can be started in the spring or in mid July for a fall crop. Thin kale plants to 8 inches apart as they begin to grow. The thinned plants will be the first kale meal of the season. To harvest, cut or twist off outer leaves when they are 8 - 10 inches tall. Keep plants mulched.

Collards-are sometimes called tree cabbage. Though it is a cool season crop, it handles hot weather well. Seeds can be started in the spring or grown as a fall crop. Start 10 - 13 weeks before the first expected frost for fall harvesting. Roots are shallow so great care should be used in cultivating around the plants. Mulching will keep weeds down and keep the soil cool. Harvest older outside leaves when they are 8 - 12 inches tall.

Mustard greens-Mustard grows fast, just 30 to 40 days from planting to harvest. For the best flavor, harvest the leaves before they are fully grown. Mustard goes to seed when days are long and hot, so plant early in the spring or in August for a fall crop. The curly mustard varieties withstand frost well and can be harvested late in the fall. Cut leaves when the leaves and leaf stems are 6 - 8 inches tall; new leaves will provide a continuous harvest until they become strong in flavor and tough in texture from temperature extremes.

Turnip tops and beet tops-for growing for tops only, grow these close together in rows or scattered in the corner of the garden. If bigger roots are desired, too, plant in rows about 18 inches apart. When new plants are a few inches tall, thin them so that the beets are 3 inches apart and the turnips are 4 -6 inches apart. The thinned plants are the greens. The tops can be used as greens when the leaves are 3-5 inches tall.

Preparing the soil

A good harvest begins with careful soil preparation:

- Select a location for the garden that gets at least 6 - 8 hours of sun daily.
- Follow your soil test recommendation or use one pound of 5-20-20 per 100 square feet. Apply and then turn over soil to incorporate.

- Spread another pound of fertilizer per 100 square feet after tilling.
- Till or dig to a depth of 10 - 12 inches deep to loosen soil and to remove rocks and any other debris. Crumble the soil thoroughly. Lumpy, rocky or compacted soil can produce small root systems or small, misshapen turnip or beets if both tops and bottoms are desired.
- Work in compost or well-rotted manure. Three to four inches of the soil surface can be turned in to a depth of 12 inches.

Uses

The nutritional content, freshness and flavor the green have is dependent on the stage of maturity and the time of day that they are picked. Overly mature greens will be stringy, tough, coarse and sometimes bitter.

Try These Varieties:

Turnips

Tokyo
Cross
Seven Top

Spinach

America
Viking

Collards

Vates



Swiss Chard

Rhubarb
Fordhook Giant
Bright Lights

Beets

Ruby Queen
Detroit Dark Red

Mustard

Green Wave
Tendergreen

Kale

Dwarf BlueCurled
Vates