

# How to Grow Swiss Chard Plants

Swiss Chard is probably the most underappreciated of all vegetables. It is vitamin rich and nutritious, and is extremely easy to grow. A prolific grower, Swiss Chard tolerates poor soil, inattention, and withstands frost and mild freezes. Swiss chard tastes good and you can eat both the stalk and the leaves. The leaves can be used as a fresh salad or cooked like spinach. The stalks are cut up and cooked in a variety of dishes.

What more can you ask for in a garden vegetable?

**Did you Know?** Swiss Chard is a member of the beet family. It just doesn't have a bulb.

**Sowing Swiss Chard Seeds:** Plant Swiss Chard as soon as the soil can be worked. It will sprout fairly early, and will not be harmed by spring frosts. One planting will last the entire year. So, plan a permanent place for it.

**Tip:** For an even earlier crop, start a few seedling indoors. Transplant them outdoors when the night temperatures go down to a minimum of 28 - 30 degrees. Even if you plant a little too early, they can be covered up during unusually cold weather.

Outdoors, sow seeds 1/2 to 1 inch apart, in rows three feet apart. Thin seedlings to two to three inches apart. Swiss chard is quite tolerant to crowding, so don't worry if they appear too close. If you are just growing it for your home garden, a four to six foot row is more than enough for a whole family.

**Days to Maturity:** Swiss Chard can be picked as soon as the leaves are large enough to harvest, usually in four to six weeks.

**How to Grow Swiss Chard:** Growing Swiss chard is easy! In selecting the location, you can plant Swiss Chard in the shadier parts of your garden, and where the soil is the poorest. While this plant is very forgiving, like any plant this prolific grower will respond to compost, manures and fertilizers.

To minimize the bitter mid-summer taste, make sure the plants get plenty of water. When you water the rest of the garden, don't forget the chard.

Let the outer leaves grow as big as you want. If you can't eat it as fast as it is producing, cut and discard leaves as they begin to wilt, turn brown or be damaged by insects. If the patch gets out of hand, do major surgery on the leaves. The inner leaves will take their place quickly.

**Insects and Pests:** Insect infestations are fairly uncommon. Occasional chewing and sucking pests will affect them, most notably aphids. Most infestations occur in mid-summer when the leaves take on a slightly bitter taste. For home gardeners, we do not recommend sprays. Discard any affected leaves. In our home garden, if an infestation occurs in the mid summer, we turn to another leaf vegetable, as Swiss Chard at this time of year is a little too bitter for our taste anyway. Keep removing infested leaves.

Deer eat Swiss Chard. This is most common in the fall when other food sources are gone.

**Harvesting:** You can harvest the leaves regardless of size. Pick the outer leaves and the new inner leaves will soon grow in their place. If the leaves turn a little too bitter for you in mid-summer, make sure to come back to them as the weather cools. The inner leaves are most tender and tasty, and are slightly blanched. Cut the stems near the base, even if you are not going to use them. be careful not to cut the stems of the inner leaves.

Rinse thoroughly and check the underside of the leaves for insects.