



Beautiful and bountiful in the garden and versatile in the kitchen, Swiss chard is a must for vegetable and ornamental gardeners alike. Colorful ribs of yellow, hot pink, white, orange, or ruby red stand out in striking contrast to the dark green of the leaves, and become more attractive as the plant grows more mature. Leaves can be picked at the baby stage for salads, or left to mature for braising, sautés soups and stews. Swiss chard seeds, like beet seeds, are actually husks containing several tiny seeds, and tend to germinate in clusters. Therefore, as with beets, thinning is critical to success.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of about 12 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

2. Plant. Swiss chard is fairly heat tolerant, but quality can suffer if the plants develop during very hot weather. Sow seeds in full sun about 3 inches apart, and ½ inch deep. Seedlings often germinate in clusters, so thin with scissors when the plants are very small, leaving a single plant in each cluster.

3. Grow. Water soil to keep it moist, and pull weeds that sprout nearby. When seedlings are 2 to 3 inches tall, thin so that young plants stand about 6 inches apart. Thin again in a couple of weeks to 12 inches apart so plants have room to grow and mature to their full size. Feed growing Swiss chard plants with a good well-balanced fertilizer several times during their growing season. As the leaves size up, harvest from the outside of the plant beginning when plants have at least 6 to 8 leaves. A layer of straw mulch will help control weeds and conserve soil moisture.

4. Enjoy. Separate the stalks from the leaves when preparing Swiss chard for cooking—the stalks take longer to cook. Enjoy the chopped stalks and leaves steamed, braised or stir-fried, in soups or in stews. Baby leaves are excellent in salads. This is one vegetable that you can continue to enjoy in the garden, even as you strip the outside leaves for tonight's dinner!



AT A GLANCE



Exposure: Full sun; will tolerate light shade

Planting time: 2 weeks before the final frost, and throughout the spring. Sow again in mid- to late summer.

Planting depth: 1/2 inch deep

Spacing in row: Sow 3 inches apart; thin to 6 inches apart, and again a couple of weeks later to 12 inches apart.

Time to harvest: 50 to 60 days for full-sized leaves.



Swiss chard makes a beautiful centerpiece in a container of edible greens or nasturtiums.