

Swiss Chard



Sun: Plant in full sun (6 to 8 hours). Space 4 to 6 inches apart within rows or 4 to 6 plants per 5-gallon container. Plant mid-February through mid-March for spring harvest and in September for fall harvest.

Soil: Amend with organic matter to create a well-drained soil. Avoid planting in unamended sandy or heavy clay soils. If the soil test shows the pH is below 6.2, apply lime at the beginning of the growing season or as recommended.

For proper drainage in a container garden, use potting mix and ensure containers have drainage holes. Alternatively, consider using self-watering containers.

Water: Keep soil consistently moist but not saturated. Apply 1 to 2 inches of water each week. Keep leaves dry to avoid fungal diseases. Mulch helps retain moisture.

Plant: Direct sow seeds $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep. When sprouts are established, thin to 4 to 6 inches apart. Start seedlings 3 to 4 weeks before planting, and slowly harden off 1 week before moving to the garden. If buying transplants, choose those with healthy color and a stocky appearance. Dig the planting hole as deep as the root ball. Firmly pat down the soil and water deeply.

Fertilize: In the absence of a soil test, apply an all-purpose fertilizer (8-8-8 or 10-10-10) at planting, according to label directions. Reapply beside plants, 4 to 6 inches from the stem (side-dress), 2 weeks after transplanting or 4 weeks after sowing seeds.

Insects/Diseases/Weeds: Scout plants frequently for insect and disease damage. Use insecticidal soap (for soft-bodied insects) or Bt dust or spray (for caterpillars, or worms). Spray fungicides regularly to suppress common fungal diseases. Always follow label instructions. Mulch inhibits weeds and diseases.

Harvest: Harvest at 50 to 75 days, when leaves are about 8 inches long. Harvest time varies depending on the variety.

Other: Swiss chard is a close relative of the garden beet that doesn't develop an edible root. The leaves' green portion is edible, and the broad midrib can be steamed and eaten like asparagus. Because of its upright growth and large, attractive leaves, swiss chard can be used as an ornamental in borders and display beds.

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