



Harvest of the Month

Rainbow Chard



Botany

Chard is the same species of plant—Beta vulgaris—as beets. Humans took the wild ancestor of chard and beets and began to grow it, over time modifying the look and taste of the plant by saving seeds from the plants they most enjoyed. Some people developed beets by choosing to focus on big roots, and some people developed chard by focusing on plants with big, juicy leaves. The same is true of all the different colors of chard; same type of plant, just humans developing all the different colors by saving seeds and propagating the colors they most enjoyed!

Fun Fact

Chard has many common names such as silver beet, beet spinach, seakale beet, or leaf beet. All these names show its close relationship to beets and spinach (a close cousin). The wild ancestor of chard was known as “sea beet”. White-colored chard is also commonly called Swiss chard.

Acelga means chard in Spanish.

Social Sciences

Chard is native to Southern Europe and much older than the cultivated beet. It is believed to have developed from a form of wild beet thousands of years ago. Ancestors of this colorful vegetable supposedly grew in the fabled Hanging Gardens of Babylon, flourished in China during the 7th century BC, and were even written about by Aristotle in Ancient Greece. Chard was brought to North America by the colonists and was an important crop in the gardens of early settlers, prized for its health benefits and ease of growth. Today, chard is most known in the cuisines of Europe, especially the Mediterranean region.

Sauteed Rainbow Chard Recipe

Nutrition

Chard is a nutritional powerhouse! In 3.5 oz. you will receive 50% of your daily Vitamin C; 122% of your daily Vitamin A; and 1,038% of your Vitamin K! It has high levels of important minerals as well; with Potassium, Magnesium and Iron being stand outs.

Growing Tips

Chard is one of the easiest vegetables to grow. It is tolerant to both cold and warm weather, very productive, and not really bothered by pests or disease. Chard can be direct seeded or transplanted in both the Spring and the Fall. If direct seeded, you will need to thin excess seedlings as the “seed” that you plant is actually the fruit capsule of the plant and contains many seeds.

Care & Maintenance

Chard is a robust and undemanding plant. Make sure to give it regular water if growing it through the Summer, and give it a little fertilizer if you’re harvesting it intensively.

The most bothersome pest is leaf miners. The best way to avoid them damaging the leaves is to put row cover over the plants when they are first germinating or planted. If you regularly check the plants you can crush any tiny larva you see beginning to mine the leaves and the leaves will still be edible. If the leaf miners have caused too much damage, pull the leaves off and feed them to your chickens! The chickens will benefit from the leaves and the protein from the larva.

Harvesting

Chard is an amazing “cut and come again” crop. If you only harvest the outer, biggest leaves the plant will just keep making new leaves. You can start pinching off individual leaves as soon as they get big enough to use. Chard can also be harvested like mesclun mixes if planted thickly and if you only want one, maybe two harvests. Cut the whole plant off just above the crown at baby leaf stage; this way chard can be used in place of spinach in almost any recipe.

