

Swiss Chard by Vicki Roberts

Botanical name: *Beta vulgaris* var. *cicia*

Common names: Silver beet, Spinach Beet, Perpetual spinach, Seakale beet and Mangold.

Family: Chenopodiaceae

If you ever want to have an eye-catching edible you need to go no farther than Swiss Chard. This leafy vegetable is a member of the beet family but lacks the swollen root. It is not native to North America but was domesticated from wild Eastern Mediterranean species. It is low in calories and is loaded with vitamins A, C, and K, along with omega-3 fatty acids. The leaves and the stems are edible and can be eaten raw in salads, but it is usually prepared steamed, or sautéed much like spinach is.



For an “Easy Swiss Chard Recipe”, visit:

https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/swiss_chard/

Swiss chard is easy to grow in the garden, raised beds, or as an edible border in flower beds, and in containers. Its colorful leaves and stems are what make this a perfect edible landscape and ornamental planting. Swiss chard should be planted a week or two before the last frost. Direct sowing of the seed is preferred in loose well drained soil, with PH of 6.0-7.0. The seeds can be soaked in warm water for 24 hours to aid in germination which is about 5-7 days. The seed should be spaced 2 inches apart in all directions and lightly covered with about ½ inch of soil. The plants should be thinned to 4 inches apart when they reach about 2 inches, and the thinned plants, if carefully removed they can be replanted. Chard grows from 1-3 feet tall and has a spread of ½ to 2 feet and requires about 1 inch of rain weekly. Mulching the plants will help conserve water and provide consistent moisture, and it also suppresses weeds. Unlike spinach and other cool weather crops, swiss chard is a biennial and can tolerate the heat of the summer. It thrives with up to 10 hours of sun per day and can even tolerate some frost, which allows an extended harvest throughout the summer and into the fall without bolting. When the leaves and stems are about 12 inches long, they are ready for harvest. This is typically about 4-6 weeks after planting. The largest outside leaves should be picked and the new center leaves left to mature. Once picked the chard should be washed thoroughly and well dried. It can be stored in the refrigerator in a vented plastic bag for a couple days.



Swiss Chard varieties are categorized by color. There are mixed varieties such as 'Bright Lights' which has red, orange, white, pink, yellow and violet stems. Red varieties such as "Burgundy" with burgundy stems and dark green leaves, and Rhubarb which has red stems and leaf veins. White varieties like "Lucullus" with white stalks and "Fordhook" that has savoyed leaves.

Swiss Chard 'Bright Lights'

As a gardener I find this to be a vegetable that never fails, in so many different aspects. It is aesthetically a beautiful plant that is easily grown from seed and requires little care. It is not plagued by insect attacks and is healthy and delicious both in salads and as a side dish. It grows throughout the spring, summer, and fall so I use it in my landscape beds and containers.

Photo Credits:

Garden Photo by Vicki Roberts

Swiss Chard recipe – simplyrecipes.com

Swiss Chard 'Bright Lights' – [All American Selections / allamericalselections.org](http://allamericalselections.org)

References:

Cornell University, Growing Guide - gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening/

UGA extension, Home Garden Swiss Chard - extension.uga.edu/publications/

University of Maryland Extension - extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/swiss-chard

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