

## It's So Easy Growing Greens by Vera Strader

It's so easy growing tasty greens here in the Foothills. But did you know that "greens" aren't always green? Think, instead, of red, purple, spotted, ruffled, or crinkled, and with flavors from sweet to tangy to spicy.

In fall and even winter, greens thrive without turning bitter and going to seed—bolting—as they do in hot weather.

### PLANTING TIPS

- Who wants to slog to the way-back to snip lettuce during winter's downpour? A kitchen garden, perhaps a strip of soil near the back door or containers on the patio, is perfect. Check garden catalogs and seed racks for smaller veggies especially suited to containers. Use a light, water-retentive commercial soil mix or amend native soil with plenty of compost.
- Another option is to steal a piece of unused yard, driveway, or even lawn for a speedy soil bag bed. Simply buy one or more large bags of planting soil, punch drainage holes in the back side; lay the bag down and cut a rectangle through the plastic on the other side, leaving just enough plastic to hold the soil in place. Voila, you're ready to plant a dozen or more lettuce seedlings, a couple rows of radishes, or other small-growing crops. At the end of the season, recycle the used soil, amendments and all, into your garden.
- Mulch beds and containers as needed and keep moist until the rains come.
- Full-sized chard, kale, broccoli, and cabbage are best in larger containers or barrels, or relegate them to beds farther from the house. Many greens are so attractive they can be used as ornamentals.
- Cole crops, or members of the cabbage family, are favorites of cabbageworms, little green larvae of the white cabbage butterfly. Hand-pick or use Bt, a spray just for caterpillars (note: Bt will kill butterfly larvae). Row covers also do the trick while protecting greens from birds and other critters and provide some shelter when the thermometer plunges. When weather warms, a shade cover delays bolting.
- When harvesting lettuce and other leafy greens, use the cut-and-come-again method, trimming young leaves an inch or so above the soil; plants will then regrow for two, even three, cuttings.

### WHAT TO GROW

- **Lettuce** is queen of the salad greens with enticing names like "Outredgeous" and "Drunken Woman Frizzy Headed." Choose from loose-leaf, butterhead, romaine, or a mesclun mix that includes other leafy greens. Some lettuces, especially romaine, are bolt or heat resistant.  
Plant nursery seedlings; start your own seeds inside; or sow seeds directly into the ground. Germination takes just a few days in our warm, fall weather.
- **Swiss Chard** is easy and productive with large, often colorful leaves and contrasting ribbed veins. "Bright Lights" is a popular choice.
- **Arugula** or rocket adds a perfect peppery accent to salads. Mature leaves can be sautéed or tossed into soups.

- **Radicchio** or red chicory yields showy somewhat bitter-tasting leaves that add salad crunch and color. You can also cook the leaves or entire heads. Let it go to bloom at season's end for striking three-foot tall flower stalks.
- **Cole Crops** are slower to start so you may want to use seedlings rather than direct sowing. Broccoli is popular but don't forget Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and kale. In containers, try mini cabbage for baseball-sized heads and baby bok choy which grows from seed with surprising speed.
- **Miners' Lettuce** is a tender green that thrives in our fields and roadsides. Be sure it is pesticide-free before picking.
- **Radishes** and their young tops too, add pizzazz to salads. Direct sow.
- **Edible Flowers** contribute flavor and eye appeal. Arugula and bok choy blossoms are tasty, and calendula petals and viola blossoms add great color. Be sure all are organically grown without toxic chemicals.

Plant greens soon; check best dates for your elevation at <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/2328/3439.pdf> or contact the Master Gardener Hotline by calling 209-533-5912 or emailing [mgtuolumne@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgtuolumne@ucdavis.edu)

*Vera Strader grows vegetables year-round in her Sonora garden.*