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Healthy Garden Tips

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GREENS AND LEAFY VEGETABLES

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'Greens' are leafy parts of certain varieties of young plants usually boiled and used as food. Examples include: beet tops, cardoon, chard, chicory, dandelion, endive, kale and collards, lettuce, mustard, oriental greens, parsley, purslane, radish, spinach, and turnip tops. Many use young seedling plants thinned from the garden row as raw or cooked 'greens'.

Requirements: Leafy vegetables grow rapidly in mild weather during spring and fall months. Well drained soil promotes healthy seedling growth. A small spot in full sun with even soil moisture is best.

Soil Preparation and Planting: Most roots are in the top 18 inches of soil. Keep soil evenly wet, but allow soil surface to dry between waterings. Preplant fertilizer should include manure or a commercial fertilizer. Use 10 pounds of dry manure per 10 square feet of garden and mix thoroughly into the top 6 inches of soil. If commercial fertilizer is used, apply 1/4 to 1/3 pound of 12-12-12 or equivalent per 10 square feet of garden area and mix thoroughly into the top 6 inches of soil before planting.

Fall Harvest – plant seed in August, transplants in September for early winter harvest.

Spring Harvest – plant seed or transplants in February – March for late spring harvest.

Harvest is strongly influenced by weather and selected plant variety. Flavor intensity is determined by cultivar, temperature, and soil moisture extremes. Hot dry weather promotes fast maturity and strong flavors.

Cole Crops: mustard family crops tolerate cold weather (and wetter soils) so may be planted from October through February.

Care and Harvest: Young plants are preferred by most, inducing chewing 'critters' such as cutworms, sow bugs, snails and slugs, millipedes, caterpillars, etc. In addition, fall planted seedlings must be protected from ground birds and squirrels. Protect from weather extremes using spun fiber covering over plants (row covers). Spun fiber fabric tunnels are also effective barriers to many flying insects (cabbage butterflies, beetles and aphids) and help extend the growing season. Thin seedlings at 3 true leaves to allow space for mature plants. Add additional nitrogen fertilizer at thinning time, but keep fertilizer off plant leaves. Harvest leaves as needed until plants mature. Frequent cultivation discourages cutworms and crawling ground insects. Keep weeds out; young crop plants are sensitive to weed competition for first 6 weeks. Mulches favor slugs and insect pests. Extreme weather limits plant growth.

Common Problems: Wet cool weather favors root and leaf diseases. Do not overwater seedlings. Watch for small leaf chewing insects and aphids and control them with row covers or timed insecticides. These crops demand frequent checking and attention.

Tricks: Use row covers to prevent bugs and sunburn. Select coastal varieties. Monitor and control pests. Maintain consistent soil moisture and do not over fertilize. Check crop and harvest daily.

Additional Reading:

Broccoli Production in California UC ANR Publication #7211; *Cilantro Production in California* UC ANR Publication #7236; *Iceberg Lettuce Production in California* UC ANR Publication #7215; *Leaf Lettuce Production in California* UC ANR Publication #7216; *Pests of the Garden and Small Farm* UC ANR Publication #3332