

MUSTARD GREENS

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Mustard greens, *Brassic juncea*, are a cool season green of the cabbage family and are related to cabbage, arugula, cauliflower, and broccoli. Mustard greens vary in flavor ranging from mild to hot depending on mustard oil content. Some Asian mustard greens have a heat comparable to jalapenos. Mustard greens are rich in vitamins A and C as well as calcium.

Choosing Varieties

There are several varieties of mustard greens to choose from that grow well in Missouri and other Midwest states.

- Golden Frill (sweet flavor, finely lobed leaves)
- Green Wave (mild flavor when cooked)
- Red Giant (mild flavor, purple leaves)
- Savannah (vigorous, slow to flower)

It is recommended to try a few varieties to determine overall plant performance and personal preference.

Planting Tips

Mustard greens are a cool season vegetable that is able to survive a light frost. It can be spring or fall planted. Mustard greens' flavor is best when leaves are able to develop during cool weather.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in mid-March or can be planted in August for a fall crop. Seeds can be planted up to ½ inch deep in rows that are about 1 foot apart. Planting in a raised bed or row can help maintain higher-quality greens by improving drainage. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.

To extend the harvesting season of mustard greens, plant repeatedly every 3 weeks until early summer. Plants should be thinned over the season to a final spacing of about 6 inches between plants. The thinned plants can be eaten.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Mustard seeds should be planted in well-drained soils and would benefit from the addition of nutrients either in the form of a complete fertilizer or aged compost.



Mustard greens should receive enough water to keep them vigorously growing without waterlogging the soil.

Cabbage worms are a common pest of mustard greens. If the population of small green caterpillars is too numerous to hand pick, an insecticide with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can be used such as Dipel and Thuricide (be sure to follow product labels). Aphids can be controlled with insecticidal soaps.

To prevent diseases like black rot, be sure to rotate members of the *Brassica* genus with other crops each year.

Harvesting

Mustard greens can be harvested by taking individual leaves from the plant or by cutting the entire plant once the leaves have reached 4-6 inches in height. If the leaves are cut about an inch above the soil line, the plants will regrow, producing more leaves. Harvest leaves before warm weather sets in, which causes the plants to have a bitter flavor and produce seeds.

Seed Sources

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny's Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Park Seed Company (1-800-213-0076, parkseed.com) are two companies that sell varieties of mustard greens.