



## **Summer Salad Greens**

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### **Growing Great Summer Greens**

There is really no secret to growing great summer salad greens. Provide your plants with easily accessible, well-rounded nutrition by incorporating nutrient-rich compost prior to planting. Ensure plants have a ready supply of soil moisture. While good light is essential, protection from excessive heat is the key to a tender harvest.

### **Easily accessible, well rounded nutrition**

Aim to grow your summer greens in an open friable soil into which nutrient-rich compost has been incorporated. Friable soil provides the best opportunity for plant roots to gain ready access to nutrients. While nitrogen is an important element in the growth of any leafy green plant, its availability needs to be balanced against a range of other major, minor and trace elements. Using liquid tonics such as seaweed and soluble or liquid organic fertilisers including fish, compost or weed tea is a great way to supplement soil nutrients.



### **Ready supply of soil moisture**

Adding compost to your soil and watering plants regularly with liquid seaweed will help soil to retain moisture. You could also consider incorporating coir or coco peat prior to planting. Small compressed blocks of coir are available from supermarkets and nursery outlets. Coir peat holds up to 50% of its weight in water and significantly increases moisture retention in sandy soil.

Mulching around plants will reduce competition for moisture from weeds and also reduce moisture loss through evaporation. Mulch also helps to maintain even soil temperatures, promoting even growth patterns. Intermittent watering interrupts photosynthesis and retards growth. Water stressed plants are less able to access nutrients often resulting in slowed growth, leaf bitterness and a tendency to bolt prematurely to seed.

### **Provide good light with protection from excessive heat**

If you find your salad greens are tough and bitter, it may be that they are being exposed to very hot, sunny conditions. Leaf toughening is a common response to excessive sunlight and heat. Use simple, temporary shade cloth covers or erect screens to shelter plants from hot afternoon sun. Grow your own shade by planting taller crops like corn, climbing beans or staked tomato crops next to summer greens to provide afternoon shade.

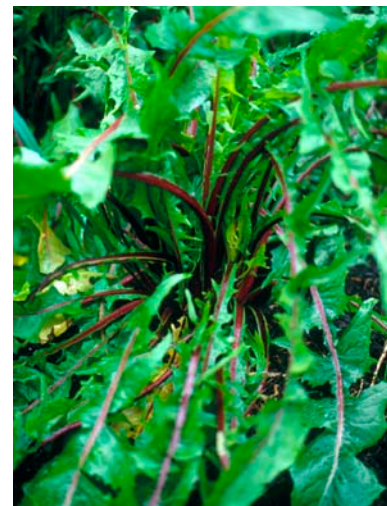
### **Safer Salads**

It is particularly important for organic gardeners to thoroughly wash salad greens prior to consumption. This is because organic growers are more likely to use manure-based compost, organic fertilisers based on animal manure and liquid manure to grow leafy greens. Failure to adequately wash leafy greens can put organic gardeners at risk of contracting diseases such as salmonella and gastric upsets.

### **Dandelion Chicory**

The name chicory is applied to a varied plant group that includes those harvested for their roots (*Cichorium intybus*) and plants harvested for their foliage (*Cichorium endivia*). Dandelion chicory or radicchetta is just one of the foliage types which also includes open hearted, curly endives, hearting radicchio and Belgium endive or witlof.

Dandelion chicory is a member of the daisy family and can be grown across a wide range of climates. In well-drained soil it often grows as a perennial plant, but most gardeners treat it as an annual. The leaves resemble a common dandelion, although the foliage has a much more vigorous, upright growth habit. Green and very decorative red-stemmed forms are available. The leaves are used as a





salad ingredient or as a steamed vegetable. The slightly bitter flavour is said to stimulate appetite.

Dandelion chicory has a deep root system that enables it to tolerate adverse growing conditions, although stress can increase the characteristic sharp flavour associated with this species. Plants are propagated from seed sown throughout the year in most regions or during the dry season in tropical climates.

### **Nasturtium**

The humble nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) is both an attractive garden ornamental and a great multipurpose food plant. The foliage has a pleasant peppery taste. The leaves are the perfect size for sandwiches and mixed leaf salads. The nectar-filled flowers are also edible and can be used to add colour to salads and cool summer drinks. And as if that is not enough, the seed can be used as a substitute for capers.



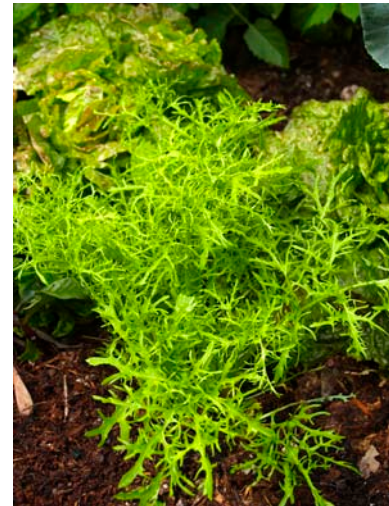
In cooler climates nasturtiums love to grow in full sun and can be planted after the danger of frost has passed. Where temperatures are warmer, they are best grown during winter and spring. Summer and autumn crops can be grown providing they are sheltered from the hot sun.

The large seeds germinate easily and can be planted directly into garden beds. Trailing nasturtiums can tend to run rampant, so keep them in check by pinching out stem tips and encouraging branching.

Traditional selections have orange flowers, but compact hybrid forms with cream, yellow, scarlet and bicolour blooms are also available. These hybrid selections do not tend to grow true to type from seed, so after a few seasons of self-sowing all your plants will tend to have orange blooms and a sprawling growth habit.

### **Green Elk**

Green elk (*Brassica juncea*) a relatively new salad green now available to home gardeners as seeds and in seedling punnets. A decorative plant, the lime green foliage is intricately dissected and thought to resemble the horns of an elk. It grows like curly endive or an open hearted lettuce. Harvest individual leaves or cut the entire head of foliage off just above the base. Leave the roots and stem in place and the plant will reshoot to form a new head of foliage that can be cut three or more times.



Green Elk has a mild mustard flavour reminiscent of well-grown rocket. Adequate soil moisture is required for good growth. Plants appreciate protection from hot afternoon summer sun. Establish a couple of new plants each season to ensure a continuous cropping.

### **Minuba**





Minuba (*Brassica rapa*) is just one of a host of oriental salad greens becoming increasingly popular with home gardeners. A common ingredient of mesclun salad mixes, the long, strap-like foliage is typically 3-5cm wide and has a central mid-rib. Leaves grow up to 30cm in length.

Minuba is easy to grow and responds well to repeat harvesting. Pull or cut the individual leaves from the base or crop the entire plant at one time. Remove any flower stalks that occur to prevent seeding and prolong your leaf harvest.

The flavour of minuba is similar to lettuce, but with a little more bite. Plants are long-lived annuals tolerant of cooler growing conditions, but also planted year round in frost-free climates.

Minuba can be planted from seed and is fairly widely available in seedling punnets sold as mixed Asian salad greens. Occasionally you will also find potted plants available in nurseries.

### **Mizuna**

Mizuna (*Brassica japonica*) is a feathery salad green that looks similar to green elk, but is softer and has a broader leaf surface. Lettuce-like in flavour, its open-hearted growth means easy repeat harvesting. Established plants grow up to 30cm across. Like the related minuba, mizuna grows well across a wide range of climatic conditions, but is particularly adaptable to cooler conditions.

In warm, humid climates established plants can suffer from fungal root rot. To minimise this it should be grown in well drained soil and seedlings replanted or seeds resown every few months. In tropical regions mizuna grows best during the dry season. Yellow flower stems should be cut from plants to prevent seeding and prolong your leaf harvesting.

### **Watercress**

Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) is a very under-rated salad green. While it grows naturally along gently flowing fresh water streams, it also performs very well as a garden grown or potted plant. The key to successful culture is providing moist soil conditions and ensuring plants have some shade. The small rounded leaves form along soft edible stems that take root wherever they touch the soil. Leaf size varies according to the variety grown and available soil moisture and nutrient levels.

In frost free regions plants grow as perennial groundcovers reaching 10-15cm in height. Use scissors to harvest the top 5-10cm of growth working your way progressively across the plant. In as little as a week you will be recutting previously harvested sections. Regular harvesting prevents flowering and helps to stop plants bolting to seed.

Watercress is a great salad ingredient, but can also be used in soup or as a garnish. Plants can be grown from seed, self-layered stem sections or cuttings.

### **Perennial Sorrel**

Perennial sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) produces arrow shaped leaves that have a strong lemon flavour and provide a year round harvest. Young tender foliage adds an interesting sharpness to salads. Older leaves can also be used as a spinach or added to soups. Remove any flowers spikes that form to encourage greater leaf production and prevent seeding.



Plants can be grown from seed, but are commonly purchased as potted plants from nurseries. After several seasons you may want to lift and divide overcrowded crowns. Simply use a garden fork to dig out the established clump. Cut away all the foliage and use a sharp knife to divide the crown of the plant into several sections. Replant into compost enriched soil and water in with liquid seaweed.



#### **Did You Know?**

- Bolting or premature flowering and seed formation is an inherited characteristic. Never save seed from plants that bolt prematurely to seed, as it is likely that the next generation of plants grown from the seed will exhibit the same characteristics.
- Chicory is said to be an effective liver and gall bladder tonic.
- Nasturtium flowers will keep fresh for a couple of days if you store them in freezer bags in the refrigerator.
- Growing nasturtiums as a companion plant is said to deter whiteflies.