

Mustard

Mustard greens have long been a favorite dish in the South, but their popularity is catching on elsewhere. The greens mature in about 40 days, making them a good spring and fall crop. .

Varieties

Both curly and broad-leaved varieties exist. A favorite curly type is 'Southern Giant Curled.' Broad-leaved varieties include 'Florida Broad Leaf' and the .flavorful 'Tendergreen' (mustard spinach).

Planting

Plan on early spring, fall, or even winter yields because, in warm weather, mustard runs to seed. Sow seeds ~1/2 inch deep in rows 1½ to 2 feet apart. Some northern gardeners like to sow seeds in the fall and overwinter young plants under insulating mulch. In spring, they pull back the mulch so the young seedlings can resume growth for an extra-early harvest.

Care

Weed and thin plants as soon as they emerge. Mature plants should be 6 to 8 inches apart in the row. Eat all thinnings for an early crop. Side-dress seedlings with a nitrogen-rich fertilizer to stimulate lush leaf growth. Mulch to keep soil moist; water whenever necessary. Constant moisture is the key to success with mustard, which will turn hot and spicy during drought. Should mustard ever go to seed, cut off the flowers, unless you want the plant to spread in the garden. The bright yellow flowers are quite lovely and form small pods filled with seeds you can grind into a powder as a base .for homemade mustard.

Harvest

Pick outer leaves as the mustard greens mature. Start picking early since the young leaves are the most delicious. Older leaves can turn tough and bitter, but taste better if cooked. Young leaves are excellent in salads.