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I grew up in a family rabid about Ohio State Football. I never quite understood how this logically translated into a vegetable eating exhortation, "Julie, eat your spinach like Popeye, so that you can grow up to play football for Woody Hays," but it was one I often heard. My parents would have been better served to have chosen Swiss Chard as the vegetable they associated with Ohio State Football as it actually comes in red.

I live in the Gulf Coast region of Texas and Spinach does not do well here -- too much heat and too much rain. Swiss Chard, however, loves the climate. Also known as Spinach Beet (It's actually a relative of the beet family.) this grew all spring and through the summer for me, although I did find evidence of insect damage at the height of summer.

I direct seeded the beds with seed from one of my favorite sources. I prepped the bed with the usual mixture of compost and some additional fertilizer, covered the seeds with about 1/2 to 1 inch of soil, and watered it in. They sprouted in about two weeks -- a long time during which time I was certain the ants had enjoyed quite the picnic at my expense. Once they were up, I followed safe advice to thin the seedlings to six inches, using the thinned plants as garnishes in salads.

I harvested leaves as they got large enough to look good to eat. For me this meant anywhere from six inches tall to ten. The more I harvested, the more leaves appeared. I harvest from the outside in to allow the fresh leaves room to grow.

Nutritional Info: Leaves and stalks come loaded with vitamin A, C, and contain Vitamin B, Calcium, Iron, and Phosphorus. Does not contain the Oxilic Acid present in Spinach that blocks absorption of Calcium! Weight watching junkies like me will appreciate that they are very low in calories, while being high in fiber.

My favorite way to cook them is to stir-fry both the stems and the leaves together with some garlic in a little olive oil. Mmmmm!

Happy Gardening!

Julie

Julie Wray Herman

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