Published on *Kitchen Gardeners International* (http://kgi.org)

For Easy To Grow Greens, Think Asian

Fri, 02/15/2013 - 09:58 -- DaveHames

I love to eat greens of all kinds, and they are a staple food on my menu. And as a gardener, I also like plants that are easy to grow and productive. So I guess it?s only natural that I fell in love with Asian greens when I first started growing them. In general, they are easy and undemanding garden performers, and as a group they offer a wide variety of tastes, shapes, colors and growing habits. And it doesn?t hurt that they are versatile and tasty in the kitchen as well as being highly nutritious.

All of the easiest to grow Asian greens are members of the brassica family, a group that includes more widely known vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and kale. Asian brassicas are fast growers, and can be used at any stage of growth, from baby size on up to mature plants. Even the flowering shoots are edible, and in fact some varieties like choy sum and gai lan are specifically grown for their edible flower shoots and stems.

Asian greens in general grow better in cool weather. Their speedy growth allows them to be planted in early spring and then replanted again in fall for a second harvest. Many can also be planted thickly and harvested with scissors in a cut-and-come-again manner, though second cuttings are usually not as big as the first.

For a quick introduction to this wonderful group of vegetables, here?s a list of five of my favorite easy to grow Asian greens:

1. Pak choi, also known as pac choi, or bok choy, is a vegetable that has been grown since ancient times. There?s quite a choice of varieties available, some having green leaves with white or green stems and others having reddish purple or bright yellow leaves. And it comes in all sizes too, from the miniature Toy Choi at 5 inches tall to the giant Joi Choi variety which can grow to 18 inches in height. All are easy to grow, and mature plants can be harvested in about 2 months after sowing, with baby plants usable much sooner. One of my favorites is Mei Qing Choi, a hybrid green stemmed variety that is tolerant of both heat and cold.
2. Tatsoi (sometimes spelled tah tsai) is a pak choi relative that is also known as spinach mustard and spoon mustard, due to its spoon shaped leaves that resemble spinach. It is very cold hardy, and usually survives the winter here in zone 6b if protected by a cold frame. Yukina Savoy is a variety that is more upright in habit and a little slower to bolt in spring.
3. Komatsuna is a green that many gardeners have never even heard about, much less grown. And that's a shame, because this leafy, tasty green relative of the turnip is easy to grow in most any season. It is tolerant of both heat and cold, though like most greens it does do better in cooler weather. Komatsuna has a mild flavor somewhere between mustard and cabbage, and frosts and freezing temperatures make it taste even sweeter. The hybrid variety Summerfest grows 12-18 inches tall, and the leaves can be harvested individually, or the whole plant can be cut at once.
4. Fun Jen and Tokyo Bekana are two greens that are sometimes classified as Chinese cabbage, and sometimes as pak choi. I like to think they combine the best of both vegetables. With a juicy white stem and tender frilly leaves they have a mild, delicate flavor and can be used either raw in salads or

added to soups or stir-fries. These non-heading plants are both much easier to grow than the sometimes finicky Chinese cabbage. The baby leaves are especially nice in salad mixes.

5. Mizuna is a frilly green that you might have eaten and never realized it, since it?s a common ingredient in commercial salad green mixes. And there?s a good reason it finds its way into those mixes. Mizuna is quick to grow, cold hardy, mild tasting, and very lovely to look at too. Mizuna plants respond well to harvesting the leaves a few inches above the soil line with scissors and then letting new ones regrow. The crisp leaves are sturdy and keep well after harvest, and they add some ?loft? to salad mixes. Mizuna is also tasty when cooked, useful in soups, lightly steamed, or stir-fried by itself or with other vegetables and meats.

Though none are fussy growers, all of these Asian greens have fairly shallow root systems, and they appreciate a fertile soil with good moisture retention. They do well with dense plantings, which makes them great for gardeners with limited growing space. This also serves to conserve moisture by shading the soil and reducing weed competition. As a rule, Asian greens have few disease or pest problems, but flea beetles and cabbage caterpillars do love to feast on the tender leaves. Floating row cover material will help to keep both pests under control. Slugs can also be a problem, and they can be controlled by hand picking or by using iron phosphate pellets.

If you?ve never tried growing Asian greens, you might consider giving them a spot in your own garden. With so many varieties to choose from, there?s bound to be one that suits your tastes. And who knows, you just might wind up loving them as much as I do!

Image (optional):

Image credit (optional):
source [1]
Crops:

asian greens [2]
Type:
general [3]
Season:
spring [4]
fall [5]
Topics:
GARDEN TOPICS [6]
Group content visibility:
Use group defaults
Promoted text:
For Easy To Grow Greens, Think Asian

Source URL: http://kgi.org/blog/davehames/easy-grow-greens-think-asian

Links:
[1] http://www.ourhappyacres.com
[2] http://kgi.org/crops/asian-greens
[3] http://kgi.org/blog-type/general
[4] http://kgi.org/season/spring
[5] http://kgi.org/season/fall
[6] http://kgi.org/topics/garden-topics