Organic Chard:

Growing and Seed Saving Information

100% organic seeds from an independently-owned, farm-based seed company

Chard

Chard (*Beta vulgaris)* is a hardy biennial in the *Chenopodiacea* family, which includes spinach, beets, orach and quinoa. Chard is actually a type of beet that has been specialized for leaf production.

Position

Full sun to light shade

Soil and Nutrient Requirements

Chard appreciates loose well drained soils with acidity between 6.2 and 6.8, but will tolerate 6.0-7.5 and a wide range of soil textures. Heavy clay soils can be helped by the addition of organic matter. Optimal soil temperature for germination is 55-75°F.Fertilize with the ratio of 1-2-2 (N-P-K) seven days before seeding. 1-3 side dressings may be necessary.

Seeding Depth

½”

Plant Spacing

Direct seeding: For babyleaf sow ~40 seeds/ft in 2-4” bands; for full size leaves thin plants to 4-8" depending on desired leaf size.

Row Spacing

Row spacing: for full size 18-24", for baby leaf 2-4” between bands.

When to Sow

Chard can be direct seeded mid-spring through mid-summer and into fall in warmer regions. Transplants can be started indoors or in a cold frame 4-6 weeks before planting and transplanted outdoors after danger of frost has passed. Transplants result in earlier harvests. Optimal germination temperature is 55-75°F. Days to maturity from direct seeding; if transplanting, subtract 14-21 days. Babyleaf varieties grow well in summer months when it is too hot for lettuce. Sow every week for a continual summer harvest until 4 weeks before frost date. Ready to harvest after five weeks, when leaves are ~3”, growth rate is weather dependent.

Frost Tolerant

Yes

Drought Tolerant

Yes

Heat Tolerant

Yes

Seed Specs

20M-40M seeds/lb (30M avg); 1,250-2,500 seeds/oz (1,875 avg). M=1,000

Seeding Rate

Full size - 144M seeds/ acre (~4.8lb/acre) using 6 seeds/ft, 24” row spacing. Babyleaf - 20M seeds/100’ (~11oz/100’), 200M seeds/1000’ (~6.5-7lb/1000’) using a 30” bed, with 5 bands at 4” bands, 2” band spacing. M=1,000

Harvest

Harvest full size leaves at any stage. Continuous harvests will encourage new growth. Use floating row covers to

extend the season.

Storage

Cool with water immediately after harvest; stores best in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

Pest Info

- Spinach Leaf Miners, Aphids, Leaf Hoppers and Flea Beetles can cause foliar damage, rotate fields if present to avoid over wintering populations. Row cover can reduce some types of insect damage.
- Cabbage Maggot can infect transplants and young seedlings as they feed on roots; use nematodes to alleviate transplant damage in trays.

Disease Info

- Leaf spots are commonly caused by either Cercospora beticola or Phoma batae and are most prevalent in mid-late summer, during periods of frequent rainfall and high humidity.
- Pocket Rot is caused by the fungus Rhizoctonia solani and is spread plant to plant creating pockets of infected plants.
- Damping off is caused by a number of individual fungi. Downy Mildew, Pernospora sparsa, may appear in mid-to- late summer.
- There are no resistant chard varieties available for these diseases. Prevention includes removal of plant debris, crop rotation (preferably with grains), and increased air circulation

Seed Saving Instructions

Wind pollinated biennial. Different chard varieties must be isolated by ¼ mile from each other and from any beets that are flowering as well. Barriers such as tree lines, woods or buildings between varieties may allow for shorter isolation distances. In the fall, dig up the plants and cut off any leaves about an inch above the crowns. Transplant into bins of damp sand or sawdust and store at 32-40°F under high humidity. In mild climates chard may survive with protection outside or in a greenhouse. In the spring, transplant outside 6"-10" apart in rows 16"-24" apart. Be prepared to stake or trellis the plants as they can grow to several feet in height. Harvest seed stalks as they dry and thresh with a flail or by stomping. After threshing, use a ½" and ¼" screen to help with cleaning. Chard seed remains viable for 4-6 years under cool and dry storage conditions.