

GE 133

20 Recommended Vegetable Crops for School Container Gardens: Classification and Characteristics

Note: All plants listed are annuals (complete their lifecycle in one year) or biennials (complete their lifecycle in two years) grown as annuals, and can be planted, harvested, and pulled out in spring or fall. The leafy green vegetables can also be grown indoors, under cool white fluorescent light bulbs. Most of the leafy greens are ready to be harvested as “baby” greens 25-40 days after planting.

Vegetable (common and Latin name)	Type of vegetable / part eaten	Required depth of container*	Time to plant/harvest for fall and spring garden**	Degree of difficulty to grow	Flavor	Nutrition***
Asteraceae (aster family)						
Leaf lettuce <i>Lactuca sativa</i>	Dark, leafy green (some varieties are multi-color); Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Mild, sweet; also can add some crunch to salads	Baby lettuce is very high in Vitamin A, and high in Vitamin C, iron, and dietary fiber
Mesclun or “salad mix”	Contain a variety of leafy greens, including lettuces; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Depends on the types of leafy greens	Vitamin A, and high in Vitamin C, iron, and dietary fiber
Chenopodiaceae (goosefoot family)						
Beet <i>Beta vulgaris</i>	Root and dark, leafy green vegetable; Leaves, stems, and storage roots	At least 8 in.	April/June; August/November	Easy to grow leaves; harvesting storage roots is challenging	Storage roots are sweet; leaves (tops) are similar to spinach	Very high in Vitamins A and C, folate and iron; also has calcium, Vitamin K, and dietary fiber
Spinach <i>Spinacia oleracea</i>	Dark, leafy green; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/May; September/December	Easy	Mild	Very high in Vitamins A and C, folate and iron; also has calcium, Vitamin K, and dietary fiber
Swiss chard <i>Beta vulgaris</i> (cicla group)	Dark, leafy green (some varieties are multi-color); Leaves and stems	At least 8 in.	April/June; August/November	Easy	Similar to spinach	Very high in Vitamins A and C, folate and iron; also has calcium, Vitamin K, and dietary fiber

Brassicaceae (mustard family)						
Arugula <i>Eruca sativa</i>	Dark, leafy green; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Peppery, mustardy; different from other members of this family	Vitamins A and C; also has Vitamin E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber.
Asian leafy greens (e.g. mizuna, komatsuna, tatsoi) <i>Brassica</i> spp.	Dark, leafy green; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	April/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Peppery and mustardy	Vitamins A and C; also has Vitamin E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber.
Baby cabbage/ baby bok choy <i>Brassica oleracea/Brassica rapa</i>	Dark, leafy green; Leaves and stems	At least 8 in.	March/June; August/November	Easy, but transplants are needed	Mild and crunchy	Vitamins A and C, folate, calcium, iron, and dietary fiber.
Broccoli raab <i>Brassica rapa</i>	Dark, leafy green; Leaves, stems, and small flower heads	At least 8 in.	March/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Mild with slight mustard flavor	Vitamins A and E; very high in Vitamin C; iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber
Broccoli <i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Stems and leaves are edible; "heads" are special stems of flower clusters	At least 12 in.	April/June; August/November	Challenging-plant transplants. Better results with fall planting; needs fertilizer.	Mild	Vitamins A and E; very high in Vitamin C; iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber
Kale and collards <i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Dark, leafy greens (some varieties are multi-color); Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	April/June; August/December	Very easy; may want to grow from transplants in fall	Earthy with a slight mustard sharpness	Very high in Vitamins A and C; also has Vitamin E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber.
Mustard greens <i>Brassica juncea</i>	Dark, leafy greens (some varieties are multi-color); Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	April/June; August/November	Very easy; plants germinate and grow rapidly	Earthy and sharp (not bitter)	Very high in Vitamins A and C; also has Vitamin E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber.
Radish <i>Raphanus sativus</i>	Root vegetable; Storage roots and seed pods are eaten	At least 3 in.	March/June; August/October	Very easy	Earthy and crunchy; can be spicy	Vitamin C, dietary fiber
Turnip <i>Brassica rapa</i>	Storage root and dark, leafy greens	At least 8 in.	March/May; August/November	Very easy to grow greens; plant transplants in Aug./Sept. to have storage roots in Nov.	Earthy with a slight mustard sharpness	Greens: Very high in Vitamins A and C; also has Vitamin E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber.

Fabaceae (pea/ bean family)						
Pea <i>Pisum sativum</i>	Starchy vegetable; Shoots, flowers, pods, and seeds are eaten	At least 8 in.	March/June; August/October	Somewhat difficult but fun. Seeds are slow to germinate; plants need support. Challenging to get pods to form before summer recess	Sweet and crunchy	Vitamins A, C, E, K, iron, calcium, folate, protein, and dietary fiber
Snap bush bean <i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>	Starchy vegetable; Pods and young seeds are eaten	At least 3 in.	March/June; August/October	Easy; seeds are slow to germinate. Challenging to get pods to form before summer recess	Earthy, mild, and crunchy	Vitamins A, C, E, iron, calcium, folate, and dietary fiber
Apiaceae (carrot family)						
Carrot <i>Daucus carota</i>	Root vegetable	At least 8 in.	April/June	Somewhat difficult; must have loose soil	Sweet and earthy with lots of crunch	Very high in Vitamin A; also has Vitamins C, E, and B ₆ ; calcium, iron, folate, and dietary fiber
Cilantro <i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	Dark, leafy green herb; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/May; August/October	Easy; seed are slow to germinate	Very aromatic; strongly flavored	Very high in Vitamins A and K; also contains Vitamins C and B-6; iron, calcium, folate
Parsley <i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	Dark, leafy green herb; Leaves and stems	At least 3 in.	March/May; August/October	Easy; seed are slow to germinate	Very aromatic; strongly flavored	Very high in Vitamins A, C, and K; also contains, iron, folate, and manganese
Amaryllidaceae (onion family)						
Onion (scallions, green onions, bunching onions) <i>Allium</i> spp.	Dark, green herb; Green leaves white stems	At least 8 in.	March/June; August/October	Easy to grow the leaves and stems	More mild than onion bulbs	Vitamins A and C; calcium, iron, and dietary fiber

*All crops that will grow in containers at least 3 in. deep will grow well in Salad Tables and Salad Boxes.

** Months in parentheses refer to earliest planting date and latest harvest date for each season, on average. Seeds may be planted at least a month later than the earliest date in most cases, and may be harvested as soon as ready. All leafy greens can be cut when they are young- just 6-8 in. high- approximately 25-40 days after planting. <http://extension.umd.edu/hgic/learn/vegetable-crops>

*** In addition to vitamins, minerals, and fiber, vegetable crops contain important phytochemicals (e.g. anti-oxidants) that are beneficial for plant and human health.