

Horticulture Diagnostic Laboratory



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Oriental Vegetables for Fall Harvest

The exotic looks of many Oriental vegetables might not be unfamiliar to many home gardeners any longer; however, not all consumers have become acquainted with the wide range of Oriental vegetable varieties that are available in the catalogs offered by a few dozen seed companies. Their lists don't just include the ordinaries -- bok choy (a loose-leaf type Chinese cabbage), won bok (a headed-type Chinese cabbage), snow peas and daikon (an Oriental radish), but some rather unusual ones, such as mizuna (Japanese mustard), crispy choy (a compact form of loose-leaf Chinese cabbage), shungiku (edible chrysanthemum), yard-long beans (asparagus beans), hung chin (Chinese celery) and engtsai (Chinese convolvulus), just to name a few.

Many leafy-type Oriental vegetables are referred to as Chinese greens. In a very loose term, "greens" means the leaves of vegetables that are eaten cooked, as opposed to some of the leaves of vegetables that are eaten raw as in salad. As a matter of fact, some vegetables can be used for both.

The majority of these greens are cool-season crops and they can be grown late in the summer for fall harvest. They grow well on Long Island since we have such a nice, long fall season.

The few vegetables mentioned below are worth trying in your garden if you like to have a continuous supply of fresh greens to enliven your home menus late in the season.

'Crispy Choy', a green stalk (petiole) Chinese loose-leaved cabbage (*Brassica rapa*, cv. 'Crispy Choy') is a fast-maturing, crisp green vegetable. It can be harvested within 45 days. 'Crispy Choy' grows about 8" tall with 8 to 12 light green stalks as opposed to the white stalks on bok choy, topped by dark green spoon-shaped leaves. Crispy Choy should be harvested before any side-shoots start to develop. Both stalk (petiole) and leaf blade are used in stir frying or soup.

'Gai Lohn', Chinese broccoli, (*Brassica oleracea*, Alboglabra group) often referred to as Chinese kale by many seed companies, is under-utilized by consumers. It is botanically related to the common broccoli; however, it has both white and yellow flower varieties. Flower buds and stems can be harvested as they appear. It usually grows about 8 to 10 inches tall. The plant has a silver-green cast to it. It is easier to grow than the regular broccoli. 'Gai Lohn' matures in about 45 days. It is good stir-fried with beef, mushrooms and water chestnuts when flavored with freshly grated ginger and soy sauce. Sometimes the whole stems with buds are steamed and served with haisum sauce (a seafood-flavored soy sauce).

'Mizuna', a Japanese mustard green, (*Brassica juncea* var. *japonica*) is technically a member of the mustard family, but it doesn't have the pungency of the common or Chinese mustard green. It is a graceful plant. Its deeply cut green leaves form an ornamental clump up to 12 inches in width and slightly less in height. It will not go to seed when planted in spring. The outer leaves can be cut from three weeks after germination. The whole plant could be harvested within 35 days. Mizuna can be eaten raw or used in a tossed salad of mixed mild-flavored greens.

'Shungiku', or Garland chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum coronarium*) is a very easy crop to grow in the vegetable garden. Its tender shoots, sometimes with flower buds, are eaten stir-fried or as soup greens. Both large- and small-leaved garland are available from some seed companies. The edible chrysanthemum leaves are as delicious as spinach with no strong taste. They can be ready to harvest about six to seven weeks from sowing. They thrive in cool weather. Shungiku is a true chrysanthemum. The foliage is dark green and very attractive with pleasant odor.

Seeds of all the Oriental vegetables mentioned above can be sown from July through August and harvested in September and October. They are very easy to grow and take up very little space. The pest problems are less serious on crops from a summer sowing for fall harvest.

Snow peas (*Pisum sativum* var. *macrocarpon*) are a delicious garden treat and need little introduction. They also do well as a fall crop if seeds are sown in late July or early August on Long Island. Tall varieties need support. Dwarf varieties -- both dwarf gray sugar pea and Oregon sugar pod -- need no staking. Plants remain about two feet high and produce 3"

Pods. Grow best in cool, rich and moist soil. Pods can be picked in about 65 days. Edible-pod peas are ready for picking when pods are still flat, crisp and succulent and peas within are barely seen. They can also be allowed to mature longer and grow peas to shelling size. As the pods are firmly attached to the vine, hold the vine while pulling the pod off.

Oriental radishes (*Raphanus sativus* cv. 'Longipinnatus') are big in both flavor and size in comparison to common radishes. They are crisp and mild-tasting and look much like 8- to 12-inch-long tapered carrots except they are white in color and much bigger, about 3" in diameter. They require a long time to grow. Seeds should be sown two or three months before the first expected frost in order to allow enough time for the roots to develop. Most varieties require about 70 days to mature. It is necessary to have a very well-drained and loose soil with adequate moisture. Oriental radishes are eaten raw as in salad, cooked and pickled. They are pithy and pungent when over mature. Most seeds of Oriental vegetables can be purchased in the garden centers or Oriental grocery stores.

For a list of mail order sources, please write to the author at Cornell Cooperative Extension - Suffolk County, Extension Education Center, 423 Griffing Avenue, Suite 100, Riverhead, NY 11901-3071.

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