

I See the Future and it's Green



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Now that the days are noticeably longer, I find myself looking at the snow-covered garden more often every week. I like winter, but I like spring a lot more, so I'm mentally ready for it already. In March, after the snow is gone and the ground has thawed, I wait for a three or four day spell of dry weather. Then the garden is ready for the first part of spring preparation—roto-tilling, and adding compost. If you do this when the ground is too wet, you'll end up with clumps of soil that take forever to break down. That makes gardening harder, and we're all trying to make it easier. So, wait for the soil to fully dry before roto-tilling. Once that task is completed, and a goodly amount of compost is worked in, we rake it smooth until there aren't any large clumps. If I'm really optimistic, I might even put in some stakes that hold the string that will mark the future rows of crops. There's probably more snow to come, at least flurries, but I simply can't help myself. Gardeners are optimistic by nature.



Greens



Greens

When April 1st comes, I'm ready to plant—no fooling. Some years it doesn't happen on that exact date. It could be a snowy, rainy, or otherwise nasty day. I just use that date as the first possible day for planting. After April 1st, I wait for a spell of decent weather, say daytime highs well into the fifties. (Our average high on April 1 is 48 degrees, with an average nighttime low of 33 degrees.) When I know a stretch of favorable weather is at hand, I plant my first greens. With that stretch of nice weather, the plants will have time to acclimate a bit before the next inevitable cold snap comes. Many greens will thrive at that time of year, even in Wisconsin. But, there can be some weather related setbacks. Plants may need to be covered with frost cloth or straw. Years ago, we used newspaper. But the plants are tough and even if they pout a bit, they'll soon take hold. Usually, these early greens can begin to be harvested just a few weeks after planting.



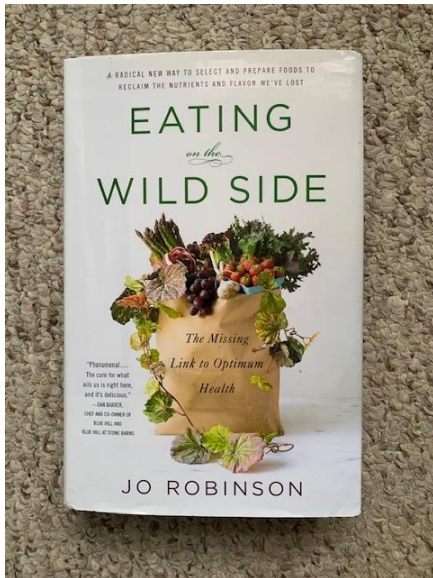
Lettuce



Mustard

You must choose the early greens wisely. They have to be varieties that will survive the iffy spring weather. If you aren't certain what will work, you can confidently choose from our early season greens collection called "Greens to Grow." We've been offering these hardy plants for years, always tweaking the collection, so you can choose any of them without worry. The collection is mainly lettuces (25 types), but also arugula, endive, kale, mustard, spinach, and Swiss chard. All of these will tolerate our early April weather. Why 25 lettuces, you might ask? Have you checked the grocery store lately? They too have a large selection. Seems like when I was a kid all I ever heard of was iceberg lettuce, at least that's all we ever had at our house. Even today, I'm fine with the old iceberg lettuce, but now I know the world has more to offer, so I grow only leaf lettuce, and Romaine. Part of my transformation comes from reading a book called "Eating on the Wild Side" by Jo Robinson, subtitled "The Missing Link to Optimum Health." In it you'll find guidance for what you should grow, and what you should select from the grocery store. For example, the chapter on lettuces and greens is twenty some pages and informs you that the most nutritious lettuces are the leaf types (as opposed to head lettuce), and among those the dark red types are by far the best, nutrition-wise. This isn't just Robinson's

opinion, she has all the data to back up her words. Pick up a copy of her book. You'll be thanking me.



About seven or eight years ago I discovered mustard greens. I'd heard of them for years but the idea of a green that tasted like mustard didn't appeal to me. I couldn't have been more wrong. Some descriptions of mustard greens refer to "heat" but I think of it more as flavor. True, there is some heat but it doesn't burn like, say, hot peppers. Also, it dissipates quickly, lasting just a few seconds. A distinct flavor is then realized, and appreciated—a passing burst of flavor. For my taste, I cut up one or two leaves and mix them into a good-sized salad—that's enough for most folks. However, when I'm out in the garden, I'll often eat an entire leaf by itself, and then maybe a few more from other mustard varieties, to compare. I like them all. As a bonus, many mustard plants are highly decorative and could be grown for their ornamental value alone. Variations include frilly leaves and some are colored various shades of deep purple red.



Spinach



Kale

I know many of you are itching to plant tomatoes and other crops that require much warmer temperatures. Let your planting urge be satisfied by planting these cold hardy greens. If you want to plant more than just greens you can also start onions—from seeds or sets, and also radishes, from seed. Resist the temptation to plant crops before their time. It almost always ends in failure, and there's enough frustration in life without us creating it unnecessarily

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) with your questions and comments!

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