

# ***New Gardeners - Dig In!***



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**2020 saw a surge in gardening** in the United States, and probably around the world. Folks were spending much more time at home and it seems they decided to grow some of their own food. We saw a new level of interest in all things edible, plus an uptick in ornamental gardening. Sprucing up our outdoor living areas makes life more pleasant. Gardening probably helped many of us stay stable in the face of all last year's uncertainty.

Many people experience some trepidation when starting a garden. I got that sense with many newbies that I spoke with last spring. There's good reason for concern. Weather, insects, disease, fertilizing, staking, timing, watering—there are many things we can worry about if we want to. But gardening is a learning process; there will be some mishaps. It's fine to strive for perfection, but with all the challenges we face, we soon learn to accept a result that is less than perfection. Ask any experienced gardener, and they'll happily tell you all about their triumphs and their struggles. No matter what, I guarantee they'll be talking enthusiastically about next year's garden. Gardeners are an optimistic bunch. A failure in the garden is an opportunity to learn. I've learned to plant extra—of everything. If I have a good year, it's fun to give away the extra produce. And if I have a few losses, I'll still have plenty. Planting extra doesn't add much to your expense, and tending the extra plants isn't really any extra work. It's called gardening, it's an active verb. It requires you to do something. But it's fun and rewarding. Don't get hung up on little failures, because they are usually something beyond your control. Focus on what is going well. Be happy.

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Scarlett Kale**

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Australian Yellowleaf Lettuce**

Start now by looking through seed catalogs, your favorite gardening book, or better yet, talking with other gardeners. If you don't know any, stop in at Milaeger's and we'll be happy to chat with you. You'll probably run into other gardeners here, too. Most every gardener is happy to swap stories with anyone that will listen.

I've been spending the start of the New Year finalizing the seed list for our 2021 trial plant program. We call it Vintage Veggies. The plants in this program are mostly heirlooms, but there are plenty of worthy hybrids, too. They'll be available while supplies last, starting Thursday, May 13th. Compiling the plant list isn't really work, it's more like fun for me. But I do take it seriously. We're always looking for new plants that will make your gardening experience richer, and more fun. There'll be sixty-some varieties in the program. The list is nearly ready now, and we'll review it in the next blog. By the way, if you have suggestions for this program for 2022, send them directly to me. Your input is valued.

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Flame Leaf Lettuce**

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Mascara Leaf Lettuce**

I want to focus now on another project that will be ready by April 1, well before the Vintage Veggies program. This is our annual “Greens to Grow” program. We offer young “greens” that you can transplant and harvest a short time later. The bulk of these greens are lettuce, but we also have kale, arugula, mustard, spinach, and Swiss chard. We’re planning on growing well over forty varieties this year. We have a fine, diverse list of varieties for you to choose from. **[Here’s a link to the list.](#)** We always recommend that you plant as many kinds as possible so that you’ll always have something to harvest. They all grow at different rates. With the many colors and textures, it makes a much more interesting salad, both in flavor and in looks. We like the leaf lettuces, since they’re the most nutritious. Especially the red and purple leaf types, those are the highest in vitamins.

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Red Streaked Mizuna**

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Frizzy Lizzy Mustard**

Boosting one's immune system is a hot topic these days, as well it should be. Even without the pandemic, who doesn't want a strong immune system? In boosting your immune system with vegetables, greens are at or near the top of the list. In early spring, they are about the only thing you can grow in our climate. Here's what I do. Get my garden prepped as early as possible so it's ready when planting day approaches. After the frost is out of the ground, and after we have had 10-14 days with no rain, the soil should be workable. On a day with halfway decent weather, I get out there and turn the soil, adding some manure or compost, and raking it out so that it's level and totally ready. Oftentimes, when the planting season is upon us, we get a fair amount of rain. I don't want to be faced with the chore of garden prep under those conditions. I want nothing to get in the way of planting. We have chosen a group of cold hardy greens that can be planted about April first, sometimes even a little earlier, unless we're in the middle of a cold snap. At that time, I wait for a pleasant day, and if the forecast for the next week or so is favorable, I go ahead and plant my young plants. I want them to get settled in before the next cold spell. Don't worry, they can handle it. We've chosen tough varieties. But, we sell special plant covering materials, if that will help you sleep at night while your plants are battling the nighttime chill. With a little luck, you'll be harvesting lettuce in a couple weeks.



*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Red Giant Mustard**

*photo courtesy of ivygarth.com*



**Whale Spinach**

Growing any of the greens in this program couldn't be any easier. Once planted, all you need is water and fertilizer. They can be grown in containers, too, the only difference in care is that containers sometimes dry out faster than mother earth. But since we are spending so much more time at home, that should be easy to monitor. We have some new kale varieties, and the one that looks appealing to me is called 'Jagallo Nero.' It comes from Baker Creek Seed, and they describe it as their sweetest kale, especially if picked young. Leaf color is blue green, and they are deeply incised. There are two new leaf lettuces that I'll be trying, both are red or burgundy colored. 'Flame' and 'Mascara' are their names, and the latter is an oak leaf type. A new dwarf romaine is also enticing. 'Tendita' is small enough that you can plant it closer together in any given area, so that's a plus. Unlike the leaf lettuces, the romaine types are most often harvested when fully formed, especially if the head is tight. If you haven't tried growing mustard I can't stress enough how much this plant will add to the flavor of your salad or other uses. They vary quite a bit in spicy intensity, but for all of them, the zestiness of the spice quickly diminishes in your mouth. There is no lasting heat. My favorite is 'Red Streaked,' which has purple red, lacy leaves and plenty of zing. New this year is 'Red Giant,' a bold beauty with red leaves that have a green underside. Tangy flavor. Try adding some mustard greens this year. If the flavor isn't to your liking, you can enjoy their decorative value.

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

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