

Chard is the new glamour crop

By Barbara Damrosch, Washington Post

Kale might be called the new spinach, but behind the current crispy-kale-chip fetish I can see a competitor sneaking up. I'll bet chard will be the new kale.

You might know it as Swiss chard, but the Swiss have little to do with this ancient Mediterranean plant. Botanically, it's a beet, but one bred for lush leaves and stems instead of big, sweet, bulbous roots. Sometimes, the leafy type is called silverbeet, on account of its broad, silvery-white stem and ribs.

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Chard became a glamorous crop when varieties with brightly colored stems began turning up in gardens, not just bright red ones such as Ruby or Rhubarb but also the multicolored mixes such as Bright Lights, Rainbow and Five Color Silverbeet. But gardeners soon discovered how easy chard is to grow. Even in cool climates it can survive the winter with no protection. Leaf production might slow down or stop, but the roots are often still there in spring, only to sprout again for a quick flush of greenery before going to seed. If protected by a cold frame or unheated greenhouse, its tasty greens are even more abundant in wintertime. In our garden trials, we've found the variety Argentata to be the most cold-hardy.

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