



Gourmet Edibles You Can Grow at Home



Get creative with vegetables. Rustic arugula, tender young beets, and baby bok choy make tasty accompaniments to any meal.

One secret to cooking great cuisine is using great ingredients. With a fertile garden plot, an adventurous spirit, and carefully selected seed varieties, you can produce vegetable dishes that rival those found in pricey restaurants.

In some cases, the trick to growing gourmet vegetables is as simple as harvesting them at a small and tender size. Summer squash, for example, can be plucked with the flower still clinging to the baby fruit, stuffed with ricotta or a crab mixture, rolled in egg and then breadcrumbs, and ever-so-gently fried. Beets, harvested at a tender 1-inch diameter, go beautifully with baby salad greens and goat cheese.

But in other instances, the variety you choose to grow is all-important. And this is where you, the adventurous gardener, can shine. Dare to be great. Try a few gourmet vegetable varieties in your garden—your kitchen skills will evolve even as your garden grows more interesting.

Try These Cool Season Varieties:



Gourmet fruits and vegetables that will thrive in your spring garden or containers include Japanese turnips, sprouting broccoli, mini-heads of lettuce, and sweet alpine strawberries.

Japanese Salad Turnips. These little beauties, also known as Hakurei turnips, are so sweet you can slice them thin and eat them raw. They are easy to grow, and reach ideal size—ping-pong ball or smaller—in about a month and a half. The roots are excellent boiled briefly or roasted, and the greens, gently braised. The Scarlet Ohno Revival Turnip is a red-skinned version, as beautiful as it is tasty.

Baby Brassicas. Just when you've accomplished the feat of growing big heads of broccoli, what comes along? Sweet baby broccoli! Sprouting broccoli, also known as Chinese broccoli or gai lan, offers succulent stems and mini florets, and produces well into the summer. Hybrids of gai lan and traditional broccoli are now available, and offer the same advantages of sprouting broccoli, plus slightly enlarged florets. Try other baby brassicas such as baby bok choy or Red Russian kale cut at a tender young size.

Mâche, and other greens. Mâche, corn salad, lamb's lettuce - by any name this sweet tender green is a perfect way to start the harvest season. Where winters are mild you can grow the attractive rosettes of mâche through the winter months. In the north, sow seed in late summer and protect the plants over winter with a covering of straw. Uncover in spring for a delicious first-of-the-season salad. Other interesting and easy to grow salad ingredients include garden cress, escarole, and baby tatsoi.

Mini Heads of Lettuce. Petite, single-serving heads of lettuce are the height of elegance in salads. For taste, they are matched only by a fresh cutting of baby leaf lettuce, and they have the advantage of a longer storage time. Grow *both* baby leaves and mini-heads for a season of exceptional salads. Three popular mini-lettuces are 'Little Gem', 'Tom Thumb' and 'Breen', a compact red romaine.

Alpine Strawberries. Strawberries from seed? Yes, it is true—wild strawberries grow easily from seed. They develop into graceful mounds of foliage that can be incorporated into the ornamental landscape, and often produce their first intensely flavored berries in year one. Start the seeds indoors in early spring, and plant seedlings out in a sunny garden spot or in a container at about the time you plant your tomatoes. The berries are small but scrumptious, especially topped with whipped cream.

Summer and fall treats:



Mini bell peppers are perfect for stuffing and elegant French filet beans will dress up any dinner plate. For an easy summer treat, toss sweet summer onions, baby squash and other summer vegetables in olive oil and roast them in a 400° oven.

Sweet Mini Peppers. Stuff them with cheddar and spices, ricotta and herbs, hummus and onion - the possibilities are endless. Roasted, stuffed mini-peppers make perfect summer appetizers. The plants bear prolifically, making up in numbers what they lack in fruit size, and seed can be found for red, yellow and orange baby belles.

Gourmet Onions. Take a break from onion sets and try some sweet onions that can only be grown from seed. Cipollinis, Red Torpedos, White and Red Pearl onions are delectable summer treats. Even shallots can be grown from seed. Onions need an early start, about two months before planting out. While it's true that many of the sweet, seed-grown onions don't store as well

as the yellow onions you grow from sets, the taste is worth the extra trouble. Bunching onions, or scallions, can be sown directly in the garden from spring onward and harvested as they size up. In most parts of the country they will overwinter.

Haricot Verts. Chefs go wild for long skinny French filet beans. They are oh so elegant on the plate, and as easy to grow as any other green bean. For bush filet beans, try ‘Maxibel’, ‘Rolande’, or ‘Velour’, a purple type. ‘Emerite’ is an open-pollinated pole filet bean. In the kitchen they need little embellishment. Boil them for just two minutes and top with butter and fresh garden herbs.

Celery Root. Don’t judge this fall root by its looks. Once the gnarly skin is sliced away, its princely qualities are revealed. The classic French treatment, *céleri rémoulade*, is a raw salad with the grated root dressed in a mustardy, lemony mayonnaise. Chefs feature celery root in fall soups as well. Combined with potatoes and onions and cooked in vegetable stock - with a little cream added at the end, of course - and blended until smooth, the result is delectably rich. Celery root takes all season to grow, so start seeds early. Plant seedlings in rich moist soil after the danger of frost has passed.

Rustic Arugula. *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* is a wilder version of the more available *Eruca sativa*, our common arugula. Its fine, dark green leaves are intense in flavor and hold up well in the heat of summer. The yellow flowers are also edible. Sow seeds directly in the garden in spring. In mild climates you can continue to harvest leaves through the winter. Use rustic arugula in salads or as a seasoning for potatoes or pasta, and is excellent as a pizza topping.