



## Get Your Greens Growing!



Julie Flowers, Consumer Horticulture Agent  
NC Cooperative Extension  
Cleveland County Center  
130 South Post Road, Suite 1  
Shelby, NC 28152, 704-482-4365  
[julie\\_flowers@ncsu.edu](mailto:julie_flowers@ncsu.edu)

What's your favorite dark, leafy green? Perhaps you're old school and prefer a nice big pot of collards, cooked with pork renderings, and side dressed with a butter-laden slab of fresh baked cornbread. Maybe you're in to cooking healthier these days, and your taste buds start dancing at the thought of wilted kale, drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and topped with coarsely graded sea salt. Whatever your personal flair, there's a green for you.

A trip to your local hardware store or feed and seed provider may surprise you with the multitude of choices, when it comes to planting your own leafy greens. This may be overwhelming if you're a newbie to the gardening world, but green thumb or not, you're in business. The greens are some of the easiest vegetables to grow!



Considered "cool season" vegetables; collards, kale, mustard, and turnips perform best in the garden during cooler temperatures. With the changing seasons in our neck of the woods, you can plant these crops as early as February 1<sup>st</sup> and/or as late as September 15<sup>th</sup>. In other words, spring and fall are excellent planting times, with the exception of collards. They are definitely a fall crop and should be planted between mid-July and mid-August. Kale and mustard should be planted between the 1<sup>st</sup> of March and the 1<sup>st</sup> of April for a spring harvest, and turnips between the 1<sup>st</sup> of February and middle of April. As for fall plantings, these 3 need to be planted between the 1<sup>st</sup> of August and the middle of September.

I mentioned that the leafy greens are easy to grow. One of the reasons for this is their short life in the soil. There are few insects and diseases that affect them also. Some of the fastest maturing veggies; turnip, mustard, and kale greens can be ready for harvesting in as little as 30-40 days! Collards need a little longer, with an expected harvest in 60-80 days, depending on variety.

Note that you can purchase either seeds or small transplants to begin with. Collards are generally purchased as transplants, while kale, turnip, and mustard are easily grown from seed. Also, keep in mind that if you just want the leaves from the turnip plant, you can buy seed that will only produce the "tops". This speeds up harvest, as you're not waiting on the actual turnip to develop. Just remember a little goes a long way when it comes to the seeds of these guys. Half an ounce of kale, mustard, or turnip seeds is probably sufficient for a family of four!

As for soil type and fertilizer requirements, dark leafy greens aren't very picky. It's always a good idea to have your soil tested every 2 years to make sure the nutritional requirements are met. You can pick up the soil test kits at any Extension office. Provided you have adequate drainage in a given area, you should be able to turn out a decent harvest with very little maintenance. Keep the soil moist throughout the growing season and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the harvest!