



CHARD

At home in both vegetable and ornamental gardens, vigorous and reliable chard is easy to grow and does well in a wide range of soil and weather conditions. It is one of the most versatile and beautiful edible landscaping plants. There are a rainbow of chard varieties in different colors to choose from; pastel green, cranberry red, creamy white, golden yellow, bright orange, magenta pink and even with peppermint striped stalks, all with big, deep green leaves. Many farmers markets also carry a nice range of different colored varieties.

You can eat the mild-flavored, crunchy chard leaves and stalks all the way from spring through late fall; in mild-winter areas it will also over-winter nicely. Chard is nutrient dense and an excellent source of vitamins K, A and C.

Use chard quickly sautéed, steamed, stir-fried or braised, and as a fine addition to soups and stews. This tasty and versatile green is also a good substitute for spinach in Italian dishes like lasagna. You can also stuff and roll the leaves to poach like filled grape leaves or stuffed cabbage.

CHARD WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATOES AND POTATOES

The softened, almost creamy potatoes contrast happily with the peppery chard and full-flavored sun-dried tomatoes. Chives, chopped olives and nutty Parmesan tie it all together.

1/2 cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes
 1/3 cup white wine or chicken broth
 2 medium yellow-fleshed potatoes, unpeeled
 1 pound Swiss chard
 (7 to 8 large leaves), stems removed, leaves coarsely chopped
 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 small onion, finely chopped
 1/2 teaspoon crushed red chile flakes
 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
 12 Kalamata olives, pitted and coarsely chopped
 salt and freshly ground pepper

GARNISH

1/3 cup shaved Parmesan cheese

Cover the sun-dried tomatoes with the wine or chicken broth and rehydrate for 5 to 10 minutes. Cut potatoes into 1/2-inch cubes. Place in a large pot with lightly salted water to cover. Cover pot, bring to a boil and cook for 6 to 7 minutes, until potatoes are almost tender. Add chard, pushing down with the back of a spoon to submerge, and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, or until tender. Drain mixture in a colander.

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the garlic and onion and sauté just until softened. Add the chile pepper flakes and sauté for 30 seconds. Stir in the drained potatoes and chard, the sun-dried tomatoes and their soaking liquid, lemon juice and chopped olives. Cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Spoon into a serving dish, top with the shaved cheese, and serve very hot.

Serves 6

PASTA WITH GARLIC, ANCHOVIES AND CHARD

You'll relish this dish with its wonderful combination of robust flavors. It relies on pantry staples and is quick and easy to make whenever you have fresh chard in the kitchen garden or from the market.

12 ounces penne or rigatoni
 (narrow, tube-shaped pasta)

3 tablespoons fruity extra virgin olive oil
 10 cloves garlic, minced
 5 anchovies, drained
 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 1/4 teaspoon dried red chile flakes
 (double if you like it hot!)
 1/2 red bell pepper, sliced in 1-inch strips
 1/4 cup white wine
 1 bunch chard, stems removed, leaves coarsely chopped (about 6 cups)
 or Parmesan cheese
 1 tablespoon additional olive oil to finish

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook pasta according to package instructions until tender. Do not drain or rinse.

While the pasta cooks, prepare sauce: In a large heavy skillet, warm the oil. Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant and softened. Add the anchovies, mashing them with the back of a big spoon, and mix into the garlic. Add the black pepper, chile flakes and bell pepper, and continue to sauté over low heat for 2 minutes to combine. Increase the heat to medium, add the wine and the chard, then cover and cook over medium heat 5 to 7 minutes, or just until chard is tender.

Drain the cooked pasta and return to the pot. Toss with the chard mixture. Add half the cheese and mix well. Serve immediately, sprinkled with remaining cheese and drizzled with a tablespoon of olive oil.

Serves 4 to 6



Growing Chard

Big vase-shaped chard plants are easy to grow in any well-drained soil. Sow seed directly in the soil bed. Be sure to thin the young plants properly so they have room to spread. At maturity, plants will be 2 to 2-1/2 feet tall.

Begin harvesting when 7 to 9 inches tall, using the plant's outer leaves when they are still young and tender. Continue to pick leaves from the outside of plants at the base. Both the leaves and crunchy stalks are chopped and eaten. Although chard itself has few pests, do watch for snails and slugs hiding in chard leaf bases.