

Q: I would like to grow my own amaranth for food. What kind of growing conditions do I need to provide?

A: Over 5000 years ago amaranth was being grown by the Aztecs as a source of nutritious grain. Records exist of Amaranth greens being grown as a vegetable crop in other cultures as long as 2000 years ago; a tradition that continues to this day around the world. There are many different kinds of Amaranth, some grown as ornamentals, others for greens and some for their seeds (grain).

Amaranths are tender annuals, native to warm climates. The vigorous, rapidly growing plants can reach to 5', and need plenty of space with fertile soil amended with compost to an 8" depth. Amaranth does not do well in heavily compacted soils. It is a highly nutritional green that is becoming more popular and available, although growing your own plants insures that you will have the freshest greens possible. The plants grow well in warm climates, and in this area should be planted in late May or early June. Direct seeding works best, and can be done as soon as the soil warms in the spring (65F, 18C.). The seed is tiny, and should not be planted more than 2cm. deep. Water plants regularly until several feet tall, and then deeply once a week. If the plants are getting a minimum of 6 hours of full sun a day, you should be able to harvest greens within 5-8 weeks. The tender tips should be harvested regularly.