



Pick outer leaves and stalks when small for use in salads or for cooking. Plants can grow up to 60cm (24in) in height.



Cut outer leaves of chard at their base when they reach from 10–15cm (4–6in); central stems should be left to grow.



Chard and leaf beet in containers make colourful patio vegetables, but be sure to use a pot big enough for their roots.

# It's chard to beet

With ornamental value, tasty leaves and crisp stems, chard and leaf beet deserve to be more popular choices for home gardeners

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**C**olourful, easy to grow and versatile in the kitchen, leaf beet and chard provide edible and ornamental crops for most of their long growing season.

Unlike many vegetables they can cope with partial shade; add in their tolerance of cold and you have an undemanding crop, ideal for small spaces. Plants are hardy but need protection from sharp frost.

Chard and leaf beet both belong to the beetroot family (*Chenopodiaceae*) and are as easy to grow as beetroot, but harvest their leaves and stalks rather than roots. Pick new leaves from each plant as they are produced and treat as salad or cook like spinach.

## How to grow

The secret is not to start too early; for summer cropping, sow leaf beet from March, and from April onwards for chard. Sow in August for crops from late autumn to spring, and for a high yield sow in a sunny situation.

The 'seed' of chard is relatively large and corky. It contains several true seeds so may produce a clump of seedlings, which can be thinned.

Sow seeds direct into a prepared bed, or in 8cm (3in) pots or modular trays and transplant when large enough to handle. The latter is the best way to grow a mix of stem colours or gap-fillers for borders.

When growing outdoors, make a seed drill 12–15mm (about ½in) deep, water the drill and sow. Rows should

be 30cm (12in) apart. Thin emerging seedlings so they are 15–30cm (6–12in) apart, depending on the size of the cultivar. Pot-grown plants should be placed 15–30cm (6–12in) apart and watered in well.

To produce the best leaves and stems for eating, and to suppress bolting, keep the soil moist. Water the base of the plant as the thick canopy of leaves can prevent moisture reaching the roots. Apply a high-nitrogen fertiliser to boost leaf growth if necessary.

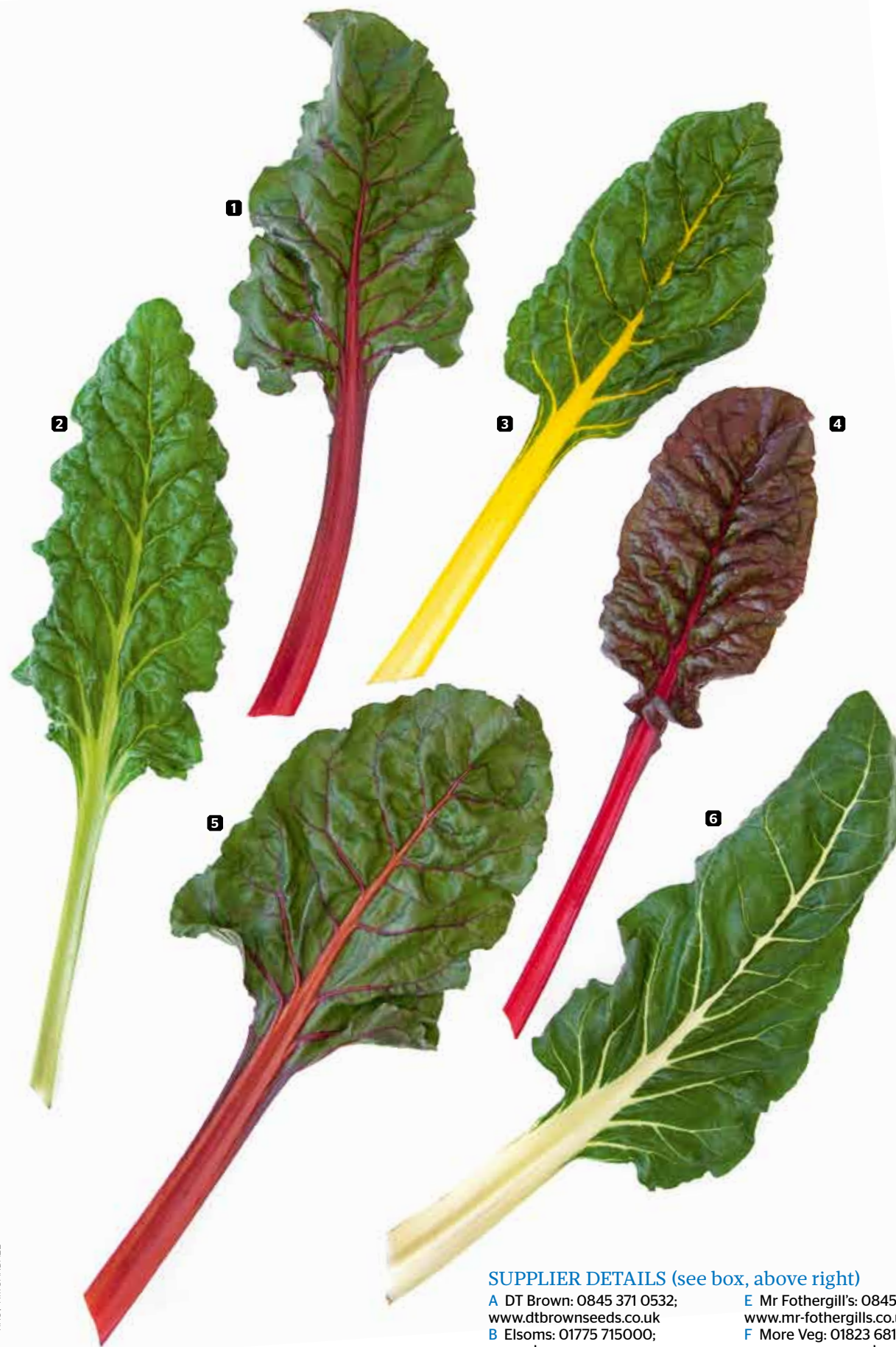
## Harvesting

Crop leaves regularly to ensure a constant supply of tender regrowth, and so that plants do not become congested. Cut the outer leaves from both leaf beet and chard, leaving the centre to grow.

As 'cut-and-come-again' plants they should produce at least three crops of salad leaves from March onwards. Larger stalks are best separated from the leaf and sliced, and can be braised or stir-fried. Older stalks may become stringy but, like celery, can be de-stringed before cooking.

Leaf beet and chard are rarely sold in supermarkets and grocers, so it is fortunate you can grow them easily in any garden – with the added benefit that they look pretty, too. ●

**RHS Online** For more information, search 'Chard' at: [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)



## RHS Trial

A trial of 32 leaf beet and chard cultivars was assessed in 2011. The following 11 cultivars were given an Award of Garden Merit (AGM).



- ❖ **'Fantasy' 1**: flat, bright and shiny leaves. Uniform growth; no mildew or bolting. Good flavour and not bitter. Suppliers: **K**.
- ❖ **'Green Wave' 2**: spinach-like beet with thin leaf stalks. Uniform leaves; no bolting, but susceptible to mildew on old plants. Suppliers: **H**.
- ❖ **'Canary Yellow' 3**: attractive, blister-type leaves. Uniform plants; no bolting. Tasty leaves with no bitterness. Suppliers: **I, L**.
- ❖ **'Bali' 4**: vigorous but uniform growth; purple leaves; earthy flavour. Suppliers: **B**.
- ❖ **'Destiny' 5**: flat, upright, shiny leaves. Good vigour; uniform; no mildew. Not yet available to home gardeners.
- ❖ **'White Silver' 6**: dark green, shiny leaves with broad stalks. Compact habit; good taste but slightly prone to bolting. Suppliers: **A, E, G**.
- ❖ **'Bright Yellow'**: uniform, almost orange stems. Some bolting; sweet taste. Suppliers: **F, K**.
- ❖ **'Charlotte'**: uniform plants with attractive blister-type leaf and tasty; some bolting. Suppliers: **A, E, G**.
- ❖ **'Lucullus'**: old cultivar of North American origin. Uniform plant with bright lime-green 'blistered' leaves. Suppliers: **F, K**.
- ❖ **'Perpetual Spinach'**: flat leaves and a narrow green leaf stalk. Uniform and free of disease. Suppliers: **A, B, D, F, G, J, L**.
- ❖ **'Rhubarb Chard'**: vigorous but uniform. Dark green, blister-type leaves. Suppliers: **C, H, I, J, K**.

Photographed 22 September 2011 at Tozer Seeds, Surrey

### SUPPLIER DETAILS (see box, above right)

**A** DT Brown: 0845 371 0532; [www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk](http://www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk)  
**B** Elsoms: 01775 715000; [www.elsoms.com](http://www.elsoms.com)  
**C** Kings Seeds: 01376 570000; [www.kingsseeds.com](http://www.kingsseeds.com)  
**D** Marshalls: 0844 557 6700; [www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk](http://www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk)

**E** Mr Fothergill's: 0845 371 0518; [www.mr-fothergills.co.uk](http://www.mr-fothergills.co.uk)  
**F** More Veg: 01823 681302; [www.moreveg.co.uk](http://www.moreveg.co.uk)  
**G** Nicky's Nursery: 01843 600972; [www.nickys-nursery.co.uk](http://www.nickys-nursery.co.uk)  
**H** Pro-Veg Seeds: 01223 499130; [www.provegseeds.com](http://www.provegseeds.com)

**I** Shelley Seeds: 01244 317165  
**J** Suttons Seeds: 0844 922 2899; [www.suttons.co.uk](http://www.suttons.co.uk)  
**K** Thompson & Morgan: 0844 248 5383; [www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)  
**L** W Robinson and Son: 01524 791210; [www.mammothion.co.uk](http://www.mammothion.co.uk)