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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Easy Gardening

RNIP GREENS • MUSTARD GREENS • TURNIP GREENS •

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Turnips and mustards, members of the cabbage family, are cool-season crops. They must be grown in the cool temperatures of early spring and fall.

Mustard is grown only for the leaves. Turnip is a dual purpose crop—the leaves are used for greens, and the root is cooked similar to potatoes and beets. When cooked properly, mustard and turnip greens are high in minerals and vitamins A and C.

Varieties

Turnips can be used either for greens or for roots. A variety developed for root production can be harvested for greens. However, a variety developed for greens may not produce a good root.

Mustard varieties can be broadleaved or curled. Broadleaved mustard has a wide, flat leaf. Curled leaf mustard produces narrow, wrinkled leaves like those of spinach.

Curled mustard will stand colder temperatures and can be grown later into the winter than can broadleaved mustard. Some gardeners do not like curled mustard because it is hard to wash sand and dirt from the wrinkled leaves. A well-mulched garden usually does not have this problem.

Turnips	
Greens	Alamo, All Top, Seven Top, Shogoin, Topper, All Top
Roots	Just Right Hybrid, Purple Top White Globe, Royal Crown, Royal Globe, Tokyo Cross, White Lady
Mustard	
Broadleaved	Florida Broadleaf, Tendergreen, Large Smooth Leaf, Savanna
Curled Leaf	Southern Giant Curled, Green Wave

Site selection

If possible, plant mustard and turnips in full sun. For best production, they also need well-drained soil.

Mustard works well as a border to a flower bed or sidewalk (Fig. 1). Both the broadleaf and curled leaf varieties are attractive and add green to a flower bed.

Figure 1. **Mustard can be planted as a border to a flower bed or sidewalk.**

Mustard and turnip greens are also easily grown in window boxes and containers on an apartment balcony or patio.

Soil preparation

Remove large rocks, sticks, and other bits of trash from the planting area. If the soil is heavy clay, add compost or other organic matter to loosen the soil. This is vital if the turnips are being grown for the roots; heavy soil can cause the roots to be rough and poorly shaped.

Dig the soil 10 to 12 inches deep. Spade in all plant material until it is covered to help it break down more quickly.

Planting

Plant turnips and mustards as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring. The seeds will sprout if the soil temperature is 40 degrees F or higher.

For a fall crop, start planting 8 to 10 weeks before the first expected frost. In South Texas and coastal areas, turnips and mustard grow well all winter.

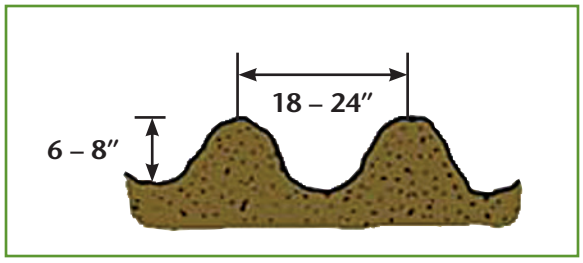

Figure 2. **Make ridges 6 to 8 inches high and 18 to 24 inches apart in the soil.**

Bed the soil into ridges 6 to 8 inches high and 18 to 24 inches apart (Fig. 2). Allow the ridges to settle, or pack them before planting. Just before planting, drag the top from the ridges with a rake or hoe to widen the planting bed to 8 to 10 inches (Fig. 3).

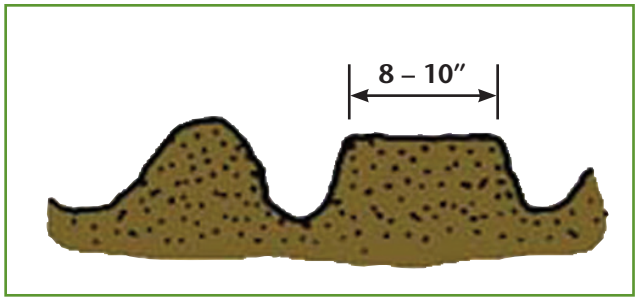

Figure 3. **Before planting, widen the planting bed to 8 to 10 inches by dragging the top from the ridges with a rake or hoe.**

If the ridges have been made 3 feet apart for planting other vegetables, plant two rows of mustard and turnips on each ridge. You can plant one row of seeds down each side of the ridge.

Plant the seeds in moist soil. This is vital for fall crops. Cover the seeds lightly with soft soil or compost; then sprinkle the row with water to speed sprouting. When planting a fall crop, cover the seeds with sand or light-colored mulch to keep the row cool.

Sprinkle the row regularly with water to prevent soil crusting until the small plants break through. Under good conditions, most of the plants should be up in 3 to 7 days.

To have a continuous supply of fresh, tender mustard and turnip greens, make two or three plantings 10 days apart.

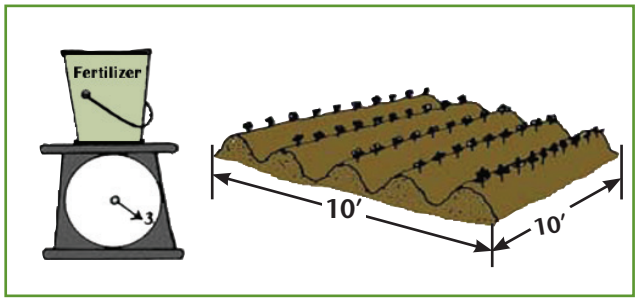

Figure 4. Scatter 2 to 3 pounds of complete garden fertilizer such as 10-20-10 over each 100 square feet.

Fertilizing

Before planting mustard or turnips, till the soil then scatter 2 to 3 pounds of complete garden fertilizer such as 15-5-10 over each 100 square feet (Fig. 4). If only one row is to be planted, use 1 cup of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row (Fig. 5.)

Phosphorus, the middle number on the fertilizer bag, is especially needed to grow good turnip roots.

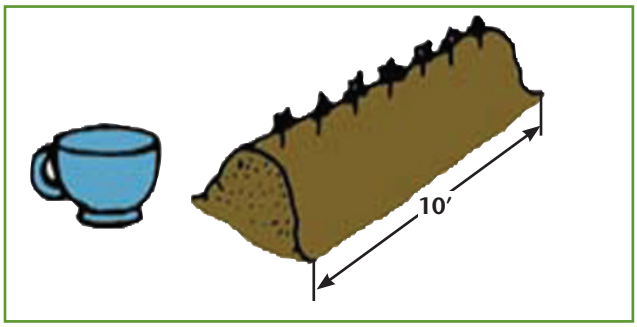

Figure 5. If you are planting only one row of mustard or turnips, use 1 cup of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row.

Watering

If it does not rain, soak the rows with water each week. Water may be needed more often in some areas. Soak the soil well to develop a good root system.

Care during the season

Keep the plants free of weeds, especially when they are small. Pull the weeds by hand or use a hoe, but do not cut too deeply with the hoe, or you may cut of the some crop roots.

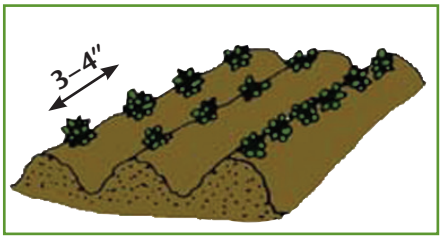

Figure 6. Keep turnips 3–4 inches apart; overcrowding will prevent their roots from developing.

When the plants become crowded in the row, thin the row by pulling some plants. Small plants of both turnips and mustard make delicious greens. Thin the mustard plants until they are about 6 inches apart (Fig. 6). Leave the turnips 3 to 4 inches apart; remember that overcrowding prevents the turnip roots from developing.

Turnips and mustards need adequate nitrogen to develop a dark green color. When the plants are 4 to 5 inches tall, apply ½ cup of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row. Spread the fertilizer beside the plants, mix it lightly with the soil and water it into the soil.

If the soil is sandy and the season is wet, apply more fertilizer later.

Insects

Many insecticides are available at garden centers. Sevin is a synthetic insecticide; organic options include sulfur and Bt-based insecticides. Sulfur has also fungicidal properties and helps in controlling many diseases.

Name and description		Control
Flea beetle	1/18-inch long; black, bronze-black, blue or green; jumps quickly; eats small round holes in leaves	Sevin
Cabbage looper	up to 1½ inches long; pale green with light stripes down back; doubles up when crawling; chews leaves	*Bacillus thuringiensis* (Dipel, Thuricide, Biotrol)
Aphid	⅛-inch long; green, pink, red, brown; usually found on underside of leaves; sucks plant juices	Malathion
larva *adult* Root maggot	Larva is ¼- to ⅓-inch long; yellowish white; legless; feeds on the turnip root *Root maggot photo courtesy of the University of Saskatchewan*	Sanitation, crop rotation, and beneficial insects

Before using a pesticide, read the label and always follow cautions, warnings, and directions. Because greens are harvested often, be sure to follow the waiting periods for pesticides.

Diseases

Diseases on turnips are most severe in cloudy, damp weather. Check the plants daily; if diseases appear, treat the plants with an approved fungicide. Neem oil, sulfur, and other fungicides are available for use. Always follow label directions.

Harvesting

Mustard and turnip greens are good until the weather gets hot. Too much heat causes them to be tough and strong flavored. Harvest mustard greens when they are young and tender. Cut the large outer leaves and leave the inner leaves to continue growing. You can also cut and use the entire plants.

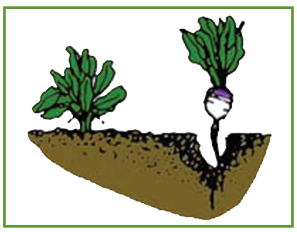

Figure 7a. Harvest turnip greens by pulling the entire plant when leaves are 4 to 6 inches long.

Figure 7b. Harvest turnip roots when they are 2 to 2½ inches in diameter.

Most turnip varieties produce greens in 40 days. Turnip roots generally take 50 to 60 days to produce. Harvest turnip greens by pulling the entire plant when the leaves are 4 to 6 inches long (Fig. 7a.) Turnip roots can be harvested when they are 2 to 2½ inches in diameter (Fig. 7b). If left longer they will get tough and stringy.

The ideal size of turnip roots harvested for bunching is 2 inches in diameter. If you want to top the turnip roots, the bigger roots that are 3 to 4 inches in diameter are best suited for this method.

Both mustards and turnips lose quality and go to seed quickly when days become long and hot. Do not leave them too long.

Unused leafy vegetables make good additions to a compost pile. They break down quickly and can be turned into the garden soil.

Storing

Greens can be stored several days in closed plastic bags in the refrigerator. Tur-

nip roots will keep several weeks in a cool, humid area such as a root cellar or the bottom of the refrigerator.

Serving

Cook greens only until they are tender. Use only the water that remains on the leaves after washing them. For more information on how to prepare and serve mustards and turnips, contact your county Extension agent.

Acknowledgments

This publication was revised from earlier versions written by B. Dean McCraw, former Professor and Extension Horticulturist.

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Revision