



AMARANTH

Amaranthus spp.

Amaranth was a sacred food of the Aztecs. Both the leaves and grain are highly nutritious and versatile, and the plant lends itself well to hand harvesting methods. Amaranth has large, beautiful flowers.

PLANTING

Amaranth is a warm weather crop best sown in late-May or early-June, when the soil temperature is 65-75 degrees. Because seed is tiny and seedlings look like the common garden amaranth (pigweed), we recommend starting seed in flats and transplanting. A mid-April sowing should produce transplants by late-May. Aim to space plants 8-18" apart in rows 18-30" apart.

GROWING METHODS

MAINTENANCE

Amaranth is drought tolerant and once established, is unlikely to require water. Slow-growing at first, amaranth will take off after it is about a foot high, to reach a height of 6-9 feet by the end of the season.

HARVEST

Amaranth keeps flowering until the first hard frost. Seed will often ripen after about 3 months of growth. Do not wait until all seed is ripe or much of it will fall to the ground. To test for ripeness, bent a plant over a bucket and shake to see if the seeds fall off readily. Harvest seeds by either shaking seed-heads into a bucket, or by collecting heads and rubbing them through screening over a large container.

THRESHING

Simply rub the dry seeds into a bucket or rub through a screen set over a wheelbarrow. Winnow off the chaff in front of a steady fan and use screens (window screen is a good size) to help in cleaning the seed. Use gloves, as the dry flowers are stiff and sharp.

PROCESSING

SEED-SAVING/STORAGE

Amaranth varieties will cross, and will also cross with red-rooted pigweed, a common garden weed. Weed out pigweed and grow only one variety of amaranth if you want to save seed. Be sure to further dry your seed before storage by spreading it out on screens or trays in a warm, dry location.

COOKING TIPS

The tiny, protein-rich (15-16%) seeds can be popped, sprouted, toasted on a skillet, ground into flour or cooked whole. To cook whole, simmer the amaranth in an equal volume of water for ten minutes. Amaranth leaves are succulent and nutty when eaten raw for the first few weeks and make superb cooked greens until late summer.

YIELDS & LABOR

Amaranth is reported to yield 10-15 lbs per 100 SF. 1-2 oz per plant is common, with up to 6 oz per plant when grown in fertile ground.

BBGP RESEARCH

VARIETIES

Golden seeded grain varieties are tasty as cooked whole grains. Dark-seeded varieties stay gritty and are best grown just for the leaves.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. cruentus (from Mexico) and *A. hypochondriacus* (from South America) are the two species of amaranth used for grain.