

# Veggies gone **WILD!**

*The lazy gardener's way to always have food in your garden*

When tomatoes sprout in your compost, do you growl or grin?

**FERAL VEGETABLES** are the ultimate in “Do-nothing gardening” (a term from Mansanobu Fukuoka).

We do it with plants that “like us” so much that they keep coming back again and again ... those edible plants which you need to “beat down with a stick.”

Feral:

- (2) having reverted to the wild state, as from domestication
- (3) of or characteristic of wild animals; ferocious; brutal

When you're striving for abundant food production, these willing volunteers will capably fill out your food supply. If life's demands call you away from your garden, un-tended feral vegetables will still give you plenty of healthy food.

In Southern California, seed in the autumn with our early rains. The leafy food crops on our “feral vegetables” list should sprout and flourish through the spring. Once the weather heats up in March or April, most plants will need supplemental water. Alternatively, you can think of your space as a winter garden. Allow it to set seed, birds will help broadcast it, and the next year's garden will be planted for you.



## **Our tips for Feral Vegetables:**

- Select varieties which will go feral in your local area.
- Start with good seed\* and occasionally replenish genetic diversity.
- Sow seeds with the rain.
- Allow plants to complete their full life cycle – seed to seed.
- Adjust your diet to what grows abundantly in your area.

## **\*Good Seed for feral veggies**

You must start with open-pollinated, non-hybrid seed. Ideally, grow your own or get it at local seed swaps.

Terms to look for when buying from seed catalogs:

- “vigorous grower” “prolific” “heavy yielding”
- “invasive” ... if we're trying to grow lots of food, perhaps a different perspective is in order
- “open pollinated” ... when it reproduces, the next generation will be like the parent plant. By contrast, hybrid varieties won't produce offspring like the parent, and some offspring of hybrids may be sterile.

Choose varieties which match your climate. Here in So Calif, “drought tolerant” and “heat resistant” are good terms.

Don't forget beneficial flowers, to attract “the good bugs.” These include alyssum, calendula, zinnia, blanketflower, yarrow, cilantro, and other non-hybrid flowers in *umbellifer* and *compositae* plant families.

## **Guerilla Gardening notes:**

If you're going the “guerilla gardening” route, seedballs for food should include leafy greens, some sort of legume plant (nitrogen fixing), and a few beneficial flowers (to attract insect pollinators and also to enroll the neighbors in liking a garden there).

- How to make seedballs <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSooimEQK7w>
- Los Angeles Guerilla Gardening <http://www.laguerrillagardening.org/troopinfo.htm>
- List your food garden on the public food maps via Fallen Fruit website <http://www.fallenfruit.org/>

**What about Water?** If your feral/guerilla veggie patch is not on your property, here are some ideas to improve your odds:

- Timing: Seed with the rains. Veggies should grow quite well all winter in a non-drought year
- Irrigating: You might occasionally return to the site hauling water
- Plant selection: Match plant varieties to site conditions. Try varieties which are labeled “drought tolerant” or were developed for “dry farming.” Drought tolerant varieties, seeded in place (rather than transplanted) will throw down deep roots and thus are much more likely to survive and thrive.

- Diversity: Some years will be too dry for some plants. It simply won't work for them. Other years those same plants may do fine. You won't know the year's rainfall at the point you're doing the seeding when you're out tossing the seeds. Thus for best results, diversify your plantings. Something is bound to take!
- Shading: Spaces with some afternoon shade should retain more moisture.
- Overspray: Perhaps find a site where someone's sprinkler waste waters the space. Caution: avoid putting food into areas with purple pipe, the marker for industrial greywater.
- Grading: Planting into a depression in the earth will infiltrate more water during a rainstorm and should stay moist longer as soils dry out.
- Mulching: remember Emilia Hazelip's quip: "Nature abhors bare soil."
- Lucky timing: Seed with a rain shower. If you're lucky, another series of showers will come along soon. If you're not so lucky ... oh well, maybe next year.

## Feral and Perennial Vegetables

For the Los Angeles area

with low-chill winters and dry summers

Feral Vegetables	Super-Easy Annuals	Perennials and other recommendations	Poor results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Amaranth</li> <li>•Arugula</li> <li>•Borage (2)</li> <li>•Chard (5)</li> <li>•Chicory (Ital. dandelion)</li> <li>•Cilantro (11)</li> <li>•Collards (5)</li> <li>•Corn salad (mache)</li> <li>•Currant tomato</li> <li>•Daikon radish (1)</li> <li>•Fennel (10)</li> <li>•Flat-leaf parsley</li> <li>•Frisee (curly endive)</li> <li>•Magenta spreen</li> <li>•Miner's lettuce (Claytonia)</li> <li>•Nasturtium (9)</li> <li>•Nettles</li> <li>•Par Cel herb</li> <li>•Pepper, serrano (3)</li> <li>•Purslane</li> <li>•Salsify</li> <li>•Sunflowers</li> <li>•Tomatillo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lettuce (cool season)</li> <li>•Slow bolt lettuce varieties (early spring)</li> <li>•Mesclun mixes (4)</li> <li>•Other mixes (carrot, etc) (4)</li> <li>•Snowpeas (cool season)</li> <li>•Drought tolerant beans such as Native American varieties (12)</li> <li>•Blackeyed peas, esp drought-tolerant Native American varieties (warm season) (12)</li> <li>•Fava beans (cool season)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Artichoke (short lived perennial with summer dieback) (7)</li> <li>•Arugula sylvestra (perennial)</li> <li>•Asparagus (perennial w/dieback)</li> <li>•Chard (cut &amp; come again)(5)</li> <li>•Chayote (short-lived perennial) (8)</li> <li>•Chives</li> <li>•Collards (cut &amp; come again) (5)</li> <li>•Daylily</li> <li>•Kale (cut &amp; come again)(5)</li> <li>•Lemongrass (perennial)</li> <li>•Lima bean, Christmas (3)</li> <li>•Mint and spearmint (spreading perennial)</li> <li>•Onion, Egyptian walking (bulbet)</li> <li>•Onion, l'itoi (multiplier onion?) (12)</li> <li>•Oregano (spreading perennial)</li> <li>•Parsnip (6)</li> <li>•Rhubarb (neighbors grow it, I haven't)</li> <li>•Rosemary (large perennial shrub)</li> <li>•Runner beans (short-lived perennial with dieback)</li> <li>•Sorrel (perennial)</li> <li>•Shallots (my sister grows)</li> <li>•Strawberries, Alpine or Wild (acid)</li> <li>•Thyme (perennial)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Cardoon (slow growing, plus challenging to harvest &amp; prepare)</li> <li>•Good King Henry (slow growing, pests, unpalatable)</li> <li>•Ground cherry (needed cooler temps &amp; more water than our summers)</li> <li>•Potato onion (poor performance)</li> <li>•Ramps (need much more rain)</li> <li>•Saffron crocus (seems to need winter chill)</li> <li>•Watercress (needs running water despite Toensmeier's comments to the contrary)</li> <li>•Welsh onion (poor performance and limited yield)</li> </ul>

-- Joanne Poyourow

Things I have yet to try: scorzonera, sunchokes, yacon, oca, arracacha, mushrooms, sea kale, salt bush, samphire, new zealand spinach and nopales/prickly pear (Erik Knutzen is a big fan of these)

- (1) soil builder, dynamic accumulator. Leaves make great soup, base is good pickled, crunchy young green pods are nice in salads.
- (2) Flowers edible in salads, taste like cucumber. Beneficial insect attractant plant. Leaves make tea but I haven't tried it.
- (3) Push the limits. Observe microclimates and design accordingly. These plants will over-winter in spots with intense winter sun.
- (4) With mixes, something always comes up. You may find that different things come up in different garden microclimates, or that different things come up when you plant the same mix at different times of year. Mixes are a great way to find plants and varieties that "like you"
- (5) Harvest the outer leaves, leave the stem and inner leaves, and the plant will continue to grow – for several years!
- (6) Seed is extremely short lived (<6months), thus getting it established is tricky. Once established, don't allow the patch to dry out and break the chain of life cycles.
- (7) The best part of the artichoke is the small side chokes that appear after you've harvested the big supermarket-sized one from the center. The baby ones are soooo sweet and delicious!
- (8) definitely "beat it down with a stick"! yields in late summer/early autumn of 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Supposed to give 100 fruits per vine and it's true. Vine will grow to 50-100ft. tender, so protect it that first winter. Toensmeier says the young leaves and shoot tips are edible as cooking greens.
- (9) Flowers edible in salads. Young leaves delicious in mesclun salads. Green pods can be lacto-fermented (pickled/brined) as a substitute for capers
- (10) Bulbing fennel vegetable is a different subvariety than the *Foeniculum vulgare* that grows wild in the Santa Monica mountains. Both will go feral in our L.A. gardens. On either kind, when seedheads begin to form, taste the succulent green pods (the part that will become the seeds). Yum!
- (11) Transplant volunteers to among your brassicas (broccoli family) – it seems to deter cabbage moth! When allowed to go to flower, it is beautiful like Queen Anne's Lace, and a powerhouse of a beneficial insect attractant.
- (12) Source: Native Seed/SEARCH