

Pondering my 2025 Vegetable Garden Stars

By Cindy Murray



An arugula plant flourishing in the Murray's garden. Photo by Cindy Murray

At the end of each growing season, I like to ponder how our vegetable gardens have performed. This past summer Mother Nature endowed us with three shiny new garden stars: mizuna, tatsoi, and arugula. Many of you may be familiar with these three cool-weather greens, but they were an “experiment-gone-right” for us.

It all started with my desire to grow mesclun, which I knew pretty much nothing about, other than its seed packets contained several varieties of

greens and/or lettuce. And supposedly, some of these greens would add a “kick” of flavor to tossed salads.

The seed packet I chose consisted of green and red loose-leafed lettuce varieties, and of course, mizuna, tatsoi, and arugula. But before I address how we grew these gems, I’d like to talk a bit about their unique attributes, including flavors, methods of preparation, and nutritional values.

I had never heard of tatsoi before reading my mesclun seed packet. Tatsoi is a member of the mustard family, (also dubbed spinach mustard and rosette bok choy) that is classified as an Asian green. Its medium-sized dark green leaves are spoon-shaped with eye-catching white veins and stems. I found its flavor to be mildly peppery and sweet, and when served raw in tossed green salads it was slightly crunchy. Coarsely chopped and lightly cooked in stir-fries, it tasted similar to, but milder than, western cabbage.

Due to its rich sources of vitamin C and beta-carotene, tatsoi is sometimes referred to as a “vitamin green.” Tatsoi affords us more vitamin C than oranges, and just as much beta-carotene as other nutritionally-acclaimed leafy greens and root vegetables. Additionally, this green is loaded with calcium and is a good source of vitamin K, magnesium, and potassium.

Admittedly, I had never heard of mizuna, either. Also known as spider mustard and Japanese mustard greens, it grows in an attractive mound of tender, feathery-appearing, and mildly flavored leaves. We found it to be equally tasty raw in tossed green salads, or stir-fried in Asian dishes served over rice. Its nutritional strong points include compounds

that are high in antioxidants, aid in blood clotting, support immune health, and toughen bone structure.



Recently grown and freshly washed mizuna at the top with arugula at the bottom of the photo.
Photo by Cindy Murray.

I had previously seen arugula in various seed catalogs, but I wasn't familiar with its attributes. With dark-green, deeply-lobed peppery and slightly nutty leaves, this green will certainly give your salads an extra

“kick.” Arugula is high in vitamins C and K, beta-carotene, and magnesium.

All the lettuces and greens in my mesclun seed packet are termed “cut-and-come-again” vegetables, meaning that you may continue harvesting throughout much of the growing season by cutting the plants about an inch above the soil level. Alternatively, you can simply harvest the outer leaves. Depending upon moisture and light availability, new growth will once again reach maturity within a few weeks. And because the different greens display a spectrum of growth rates, you’ll find as we did, that each harvest offers a unique mixture of tastes, textures, and visual interest. Keep in mind that, as the leaves age, they become less tender, while their flavors become more intense.

Our mesclun seeds required sowing in sunny to partially shaded, organically-rich plots with soil temperatures between 40- and 70-degrees Fahrenheit at a depth of $\frac{1}{4}$ ”. We kept the plots moist but not wet, which induced quick growth that yielded sweet, tender greens. To grow successive crops, we planted more seeds every few weeks. The only problem we encountered was the first crop producing mostly arugula and mizuna. After that, I made certain to mix the seeds thoroughly before pouring them out of the packet.

What’s different, as well as delightful, about the Murray’s 2025 vegetable garden is that, unlike previous years, we’re still harvesting! Although our garden has experienced several frosts, a number of flavorful mizuna and arugula plants continue growing strong. Due to our mesclun experiment, we are excited to report this year’s growing season should extend a few more weeks.



A tasty beef and garden-vegetable stir-fry including tatsoi, mizuna, and arugula. Photo by Cindy Murray

Cindy Murray has been a Master Gardener since 2010. She enjoys photographing birds, arthropods, and Arizona's gorgeous skies.