

Growing Greens 10 Months of the Year

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Seeds of Solidarity Farm

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At Seeds of Solidarity Farm we grow specialty greens in three 30' by 96' foot unheated greenhouses from March through December. A fourth greenhouse will be going up in November, and all are from Ledgewood Greenhouses in New Hampshire. Each greenhouse has seven 96-foot beds and we plant an average of 250- 300 feet of bed space each week in order to keep a steady supply of greens for restaurants, food coops and school accounts. We grow baby lettuce, spinach, arugula, tatsoi, red choy, spicy greens mix, dandelions, pea greens, and microgreens as well as full sized chard and basil in the greenhouses.

From July through September, the greenhouses are covered with shade cloth and have roll-up sides, the perfect growing conditions for baby greens. With today's global warming and erratic weather patterns it makes it difficult to grow baby greens outside. As I speak, the few beds of greens outside have been severely damaged by heavy fall rains, and this has happened the last few years. We use two rows of low- pressure sprinklers 4 feet on center in each greenhouse plus a hose hooked up to a hose trolley. This allows consistent watering for optimal growth. The combination of less wind damage, less critter damage, less insect damage, and no hail makes for high quality greens. When I have done trials comparing outside greens with greenhouse greens the difference is incredibly noticeable. The greenhouse greens are much more tender.

We do not till the beds in our greenhouses, which makes it the perfect home for worms and microbes. We like to tell folks visiting the farm that we raise worms in the beds and grow greens on top. With Outredgeous from Johnny's, our favorite lettuce variety, we can get up to 15 market quality harvests per planting with highly fertile beds and consistent moisture. On average we get from four to eight harvests per crop with the cut and come again method. We harvest with scissors and Johnny's new greens harvester. We have experimented with Johnny's six-row seeder, but have had great success by scatter sowing seeds that allow for maximum greens per bed. I see greenhouse production becoming a larger part of New England agriculture due to the erratic weather patterns.

We also grow tomatoes, three kinds of kale and collards for our accounts, and 17 varieties of seed garlic for the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival. September 20-21 2008, see you there.