

# Which Asian veggies are easy to grow?



**Debby Finley**  
*Ask a Master Gardener*

**Q**uestion: My friends tell me that Asian vegetables are healthy and easy to grow. I'd like to experiment with my garden and am looking for some fun alternatives. What can you tell me?

**A**nswer: Asian vegetables are tasty and nutritious and are showing up in more supermarkets, farmers markets and personal gardens.

Many Asian specialties are especially suited to the cool conditions of the early spring garden, are versatile and quick to mature. Asian vegetables offer rich colors, graceful forms and mouth-pleasing textures. They can be used in traditional stir-fries, soups, pickles, wraps and salad greens.

There are enormous health benefits as many Asian vegetables are excellent sources of essential minerals and high in dietary fiber as well as naturally-occurring vitamin C, calcium and beta carotene.

Asian vegetables are generally those vegetable crops originating from East Asia (China, Japan and Korea) and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar). They can also include crops of South Asia (India and Pakistan).

The interest in ethnic and specialty vegetables is increasing in the U.S. because of the American consumer's desire for more variety in their diet coupled with a more health-conscious public.

Suyo Long Chinese cucumbers are botanically classified as *Cucumis sativus* and are a "burpless" variety, as they lack the



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compound cucurbitacin that gives other varieties their bitterness. Suyo Long cucumbers are thin and cylindrical, growing up to 45 centimeters in length and do not naturally grow straight, thus can form interesting shapes, like curlicues, if not trellised.

The edible skin is dark green and thin, with a ridged and knobbed texture, offering a sweet to mild flavor and a crisp texture. Best suited for raw applications like chilled soups or cucumber salads, Suyo Long cucumbers can also be used as refrigerator pickles.

Bok choy, pak choi, or pok choi, *Brassica rapa*, is an odd-looking deep green leafy vegetable resembling Romaine lettuce on top and large celery on the bottom. The name "bok choy" originated from the Chinese word for "soup spoon" because of the

shape of its leaves. It is a type of Chinese cabbage that is very adaptable in cooking and extremely nutritious.

A striking Chinese daikon root vegetable, the watermelon radish, *Raphanus sativus*, also known as rooseheart or red meat, is related to the turnip and horseradish family. Although daikon radishes are white mild-flavored winter radishes, the watermelon radish is unique.

It produces large, 2- to 4-inch roots with pale green exteriors and rich rose-red crunchy flesh the same color as a perfectly ripe watermelon. The sweet, mild to just slightly peppery flesh is perfect to shred into salads for gorgeous color and flavor.

Oregon giant snow peas, *Pisum sativum*, are flat, edible pea pods that contain tiny peas used for tasty stir-fries or eating raw. These special



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snow peas were bred by Dr. James Baggett of Oregon State University and are available in seeds that yield 5-inch crispy flat pods on sturdy short vines and are resistant to powdery mildew, enation mosaic and common wilt.

Variety in your garden

translates to variety on your dinner table. It can be fun and satisfying to harvest from a garden with true international flavors.

*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at*

*douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-236-3052 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*