

# How to grow Asian Vegetables



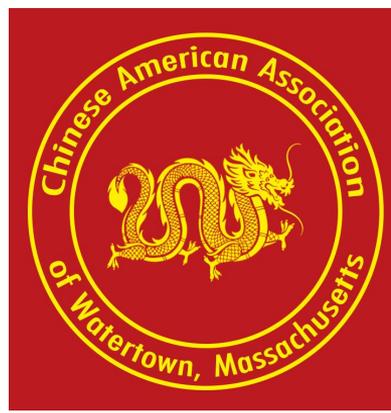
Lei Ma, Delia Guo

Chinese American  
Association of  
Watertown

1	Introductions & Overview	10 min
2	Gardening Tips	50 min
3	Q&A	20 min
4	Take some seeds	10 min

Chinese Vegetable Introduction

# Chinese American Association of Watertown



- Founded in 2023
- Promote understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture
- Everyone is welcome at our events
- Please join our group to socialize with us!



Learn Mahjong Night



Lantern Painting



Dragon Boat race team



# Lunar New Year Celebration!

Sat. February 28 | 1 PM | All Ages | at WFPL

*Featuring Wu An Martial Arts*



**WATERTOWN**  
FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Join CAA Watertown to help plan future events!



scan for the sign up google form

# Watertown Community Gardens

- Founded in 2011
- Mission:
  - To empower people to grow their own food, promote environmental stewardship, and create community connections through gardening in Watertown.
- Operate 2 community gardens:
  - Arsenal Park and Union Market
- Public pollinator gardens
  - Filippello Park, Knowles Delta, Boylston St Bump Outs, Senior Center
- Watertown-Cambridge Greenway stewardship
- Workshops, volunteer opportunities



# Auntie Choy & Auntie Mei

- Both moved to Boston/Watertown in the early 90s
- Aunties did not garden until after moving to Watertown and their kids were school aged
- They learned to grow asian greens throughout the years alongside their spouses
- Also learned from calling friends/family in China who work on farms for advice
- Enjoy sharing their gardening experiences and cultural knowledge with their neighbors and friends



# Xin Peng

- Grew up on a farm in rural China
- Was the first person in his village to go to college
- Move to the USA to pursue a career in computer science/tech
- Took night classes in agriculture, always wanting to go back to the farm
- Has been volunteering for several years in Field of Greens
- Prolific gardener of vegetables and native flowers (was part of Watertown open gardens last year)



# Julie Wormser

- Chief climate officer for City of Cambridge
- Background in biology and science policy
- Years of experience volunteering and running the organic farm Field of Greens in Lincoln
- Homesteader in her micro farm in Cambridge, growing whole grains, chickens, and experimenting with different vegetables every year
- Will field the Q&A portion of today's seminar



# Rapid (!) Overview of Asian vegetables & their uses



We have specific growing tips & seeds for vegetables with the gold background

# Greens

## Notes

“Choys”

A choy (and Celtuce)

Bok Choy

Sub varieties

Chrysanthemum Greens

Amaranth

Watercress

Water spinach

Sweet potato leaf

- Commonly weedy plants
- Eating all parts of the plant, especially stems
- Common prep is stir fry with garlic or steamed/blanched and drizzle sauce over
- Rarely eaten raw

A-choy aka  
Chinese lettuce  
(油麦菜 (A菜)  
yóumàicài,  
*Latuca sativa*)



Celtuce aka  
stem lettuce (莴  
笋 wōsǔn,  
*Latuca sativa*  
*var. augustana*)



Celtuce Salad (The Woks of Life)

Bok Choy (白菜  
báicài, *Brassica  
rapa var.  
Chinensis*)



Chrysanthemum  
greens (茼蒿  
tónghāo/tongho,  
*Glebionis  
coronaria*)



Chrysanthemum  
greens (The Woks of  
Life)

Mustard greens  
(芥菜 jiècài,  
*Brassica juncea*  
*var. foliosa*)



芥菜粥



Vegetable  
Amaranth (苋菜  
xiancai,  
*Amaranthus*  
*tricolor*, *A.*  
*cruentus*, *A.*  
*blitum*, *A. dubius*,  
etc)



Amaranth greens  
(The Woks of Life)

Water spinach  
(空心菜 kōngxīn  
cài, *Ipomoea*  
*aquatica*)



The Woks of Life

Sweet Potato  
Leaf (地瓜苗 dì  
guā miáo,  
*Ipomoea*  
*batatas*)



# Herbs and other aromatics

## Notes

Garlic chives  
Scallions & leeks  
Cilantro  
Basil  
Shiso leaf  
Chinese celery  
Peppers

- Ginger, garlic, and scallions = culinary trinity for Chinese food
- Suitable for indoor gardens & containers
- Used as both vegetable and herb
- Used in QUANTITY, mostly FRESH, not dried

# Chinese garlic chives (韭菜 jiǔcài, *Allium tuberosum*)



Scallions &  
leeks (葱 cōng  
or 大葱 dàcōng,  
*Allium*  
*fistulosum/ampe*  
*loprasum*)



Shiso/perilla (紫  
苏 zisu, *Perilla  
frutescens*)



Chinese Celery  
(芹菜 qíncài,  
*Apium*  
*graveolens*  
Secalinum  
Group)



.com

Baidu 百科

# Legumes

## Notes

Green beans  
Long beans  
Soy beans  
Snap/snow peas

- Twists on familiar varieties
- Usually eaten fresh (even beans), not dried
- Usually cooked, not raw
- Starchiness & crispness is valued
- Leaves are also eaten

Long Beans (aka  
asparagus bean  
豇豆 jiāngdòu,  
*Vigna*  
*unquiculata*  
subsp.  
*sesquipedalis*)



Snow/snap pea  
(豌豆 wāndòu,  
*Pisum sativum*  
*var.*  
*macrocarpon*)



# Melons and Gourds

## Notes

Bitter Melon  
Chayote  
Winter Melon  
Luffa

- Melons you may not have had before!
- Stews, soups, steamed, and stir-fried
- Valued for long storage
- Light and not starchy (cf. pumpkin/squashes)

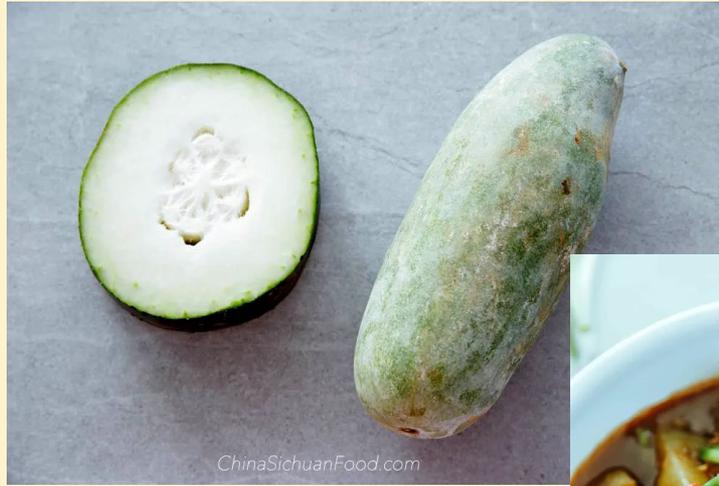
Bitter melon (苦  
瓜 kǔguā,  
*Momordica  
charantia*)



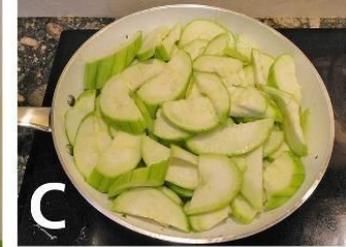
[thewoksoflife.com](http://thewoksoflife.com)



Winter Melon  
aka wax gourd  
(冬瓜 dōngguā,  
*Benincasa  
hispida*)



Luffa aka  
Chinese okra  
(丝瓜 sīguā,  
*Luffa acutangula*  
or *L. aegyptiaca*)





# General Gardening Tips

## Scatter with sand

- For small easy to germinate seeds
- Mix with some sand to give volume
- Scatter in a small area on top of soil
- Cover with thin layer of soil & water in



homesteadandchill.com



theseedcollection.com.au

## Soak with paper towel

- For large slower germinating seeds
- Soak overnight or for 1-2 days
- Place on a damp paper towel in a ziplock on a warm shelf
- Transplant to soil once germinated

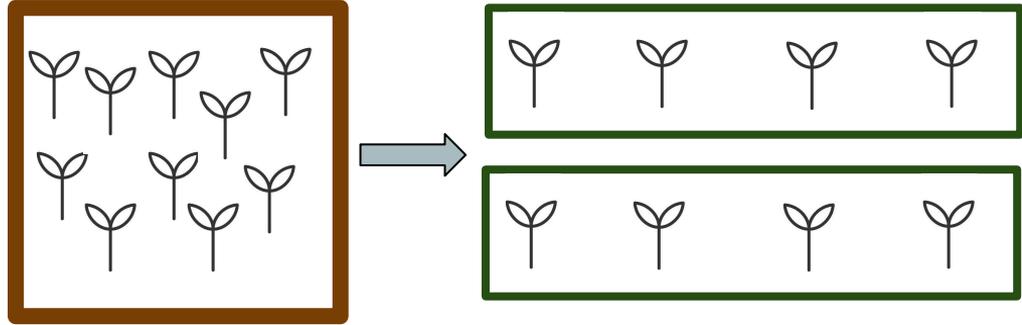
## Maximize planting space with trellises

- Build sturdy trellises that overhang, not just vertically but also horizontally
- Vining plants can be trellised to free up space below
- Plant shade-tolerant greens below trellis
- Right: Winter melon above, celery & sweet potato below
- For today's seminar, trellising will be important for:
  - Long beans
  - Winter Melon



## Sow in small area then transplant

- Helps plants grow with outside conditions from the beginning
- Less waste than sowing densely then thinning
- Only transplant healthy seedlings



## Sow densely to crowd out weeds

- “Lazy” alternative to approach above
- Grows more crops by weight/area but crops will be smaller less pretty
- Good for small well fertilized gardens
- Good for leafy greens
- Left: Amaranth greens in small area

## Find a good source for compost & manure

- Soil fertility is super important
- Need to amend every season
- Watertown DPW gives out Black Earth Compost every April =>
- Find a connection get rabbit, chicken, other manure from local friends
- Dig a trench and place manure



## Save or collect grass clippings for mulch

- Mulch helps retain soil moisture
- Adds to soil fertility as it decomposes
- Can help reduce weeds if you have a deep mulch layer
- Left: Winter melon seedlings

## Start with containers to build confidence

- Less weeding pressure
- Easier to keep soil moisture
- Can move around your yard to find best sun location
- Might need to buy soil (\$\$\$)

## Veggies good for containers

- Watercress
- Water Spinach
- Herbs

## Advanced containers

- Fruit trees
- Bushes

# Vegetable specific guide



# Chrysanthemum Greens

*“Easiest vegetable. Just scatter it and it’ll grow anywhere.” - Auntie Mei*



1. Sow using sand method when outside temperatures are 60 F or more
2. Water well and keep soil well-draining
3. Can be harvested as baby greens in 5-6 weeks
4. Transplant to larger area if you want to harvest bigger leaves
5. Harvest up to a few inches above ground regularly
  - a. Keeps leaves tender
  - b. Encourages more vegetative growth
6. Will bolt at higher (>85F) temperatures
  - a. Leaves become bitter
  - b. Flowers are edible but slightly bitter

# Bok Choy & Mustard Greens

1. Sow using sand method in small area as soon as “weather is nice” in loose soil
2. Will germinate in ~7 days
3. Add thin dusting of fertilizer weekly when it germinates
4. You can transplant them to grow them bigger or eat them small
5. Lazy way: harvest the biggest ones to thin. No transplant.
6. Very quick harvest (30-45 days)
7. Can have an early spring or fall sowing
8. Bolts in the hot weather, likes cool weather, rich & moist soil



## Shanghai Bok Choy ⇒

Bigger than baby bok choy, soft,  
can be harvested small



⇐ White Bok Choy

Bigger than Shanghai Bok Choy

Crispier/crunchier texture (same  
taste)

Less leafy, more stems

White stems, dark leaves

# Chinese celery

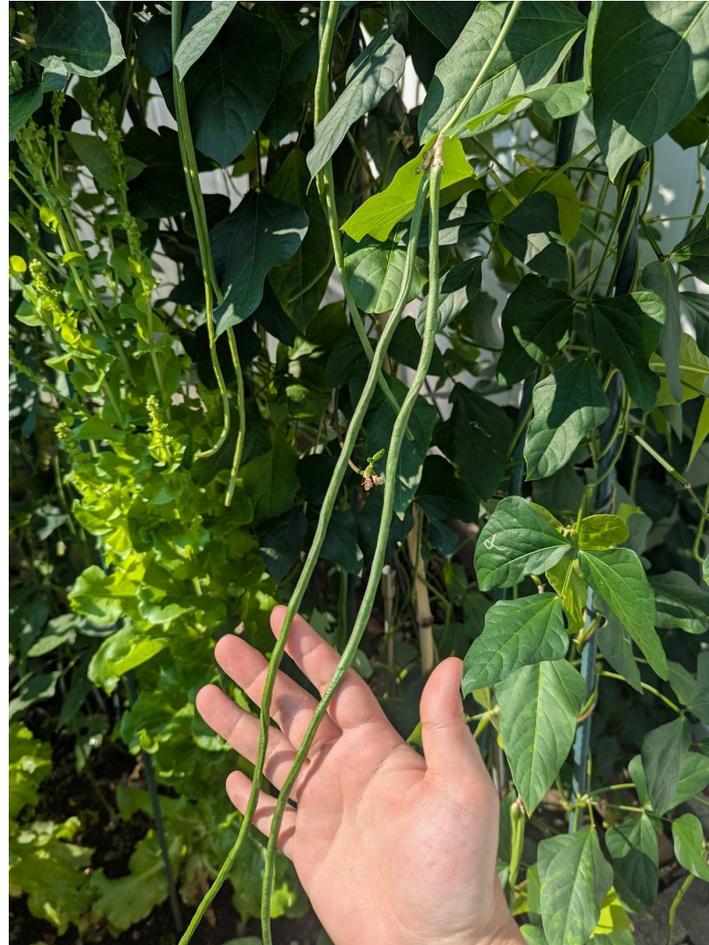
1. Can use either sand sow or paper towel method to germinate
2. If direct sowing, wait until early April after frost w/ 60F soil
  - a. Put thin layer of soil on top and water
3. After 3 inches tall, transplant to 6 inches apart (~June)
4. Scatter thin fertilizer weekly
5. ALWAYS water
6. Will be big and leafy in July/August
7. Harvest leaves & small stems at first, then entire plant
8. Grows for a long time into the fall, can withstand some frost if you cover it with plastic box



Youtube: AsianGarden2Table

# Long Beans

1. In May: use the soak (~few hours) + paper towel germination method
2. Place seedlings in ground 6" apart
3. Dust with fertilizer every week
4. Place on trellis once 6" tall
5. In July/August prune 2 of every 3 leaf cluster (eat the leaves!)
6. Prune old leaves & stems on bottom once the top is bushy
  - a. Leave trimmings as compost on ground
7. Beans should be ready in August ⇒
8. Will get fibrous if you wait too long
  - a. If so, then save for seed
9. Will produce through November





Prune these leaves to encourage vertical growth!

Alliums on the bottom deter rabbits & get you more food

# Long Beans

- Notice clean bottom section
  - room for growing shade-loving leafy greens like bok choy, mustard, etc
- Bushy on top
- Beans everywhere
- Trellis doesn't need overhang, can be straight up and down



# Winter Melon

## Motivation and Inspiration first

- Winter melons can be stored at room temp for >1 year
- One plant can produce 20 melons of various sizes
- A mature melon weighs ~20 pounds or more
- Grows super fast from seedling to vigorous flowering vine

“Very rewarding. My favorite.” - Auntie Mei



# Winter Melon: Germinating and fertilizing

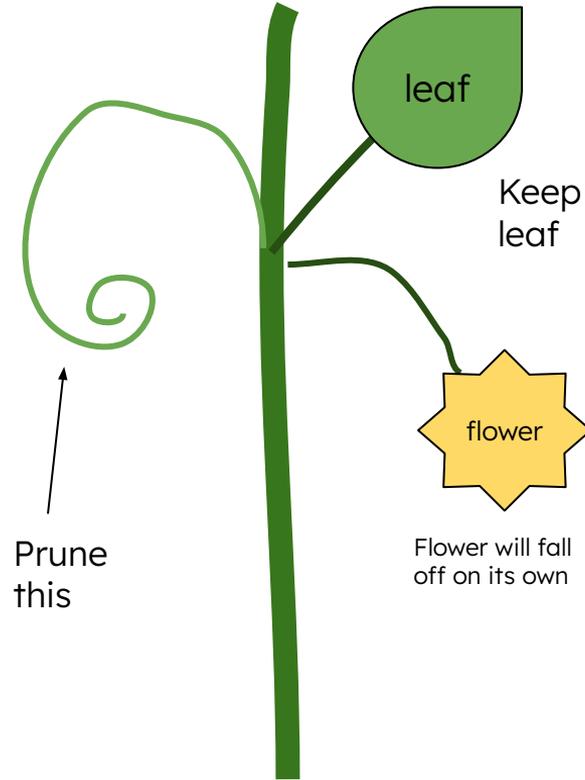
1. Prep bed:
  - a. Dig 6” deep trench between rows & fill with manure.
  - b. Cover with soil
2. Start in May (after Mother’s Day)
3. Soak seeds for at least 1 day
4. Germinate using paper towel method at 60+ F indoors
5. Sow densely in little area outside, cover with soil, water well
6. Transplant after it has 4 leaves, 1-2’ apart
  - a. Dig a hole, fill with compost, put the transplant int
  - b. Cover with grass clipping mulch
7. Water twice a day



June 20, 2025

# Winter Melon: Trellising & pruning

1. Make a circle with the first couple feet of viny growth and **bury it**
  - a. It will grow roots and make the base stronger
2. Trellis the stem that grows from the buried circle
3. In one month (late July) it should be fully bushy and flowering
4. Prune the bottom leaves off
5. Prune the extra tendrils that come off the secondary stalks
6. Flowers will create immature gourds that can be harvested for very tender eating (~August)
7. Choose one or two big melons at the top to keep for maturity, harvest the previous immature ones
8. Melons mature late September





Pruned bottom leaves left as compost

Support heavy melons by tying the stem near the melon to the trellis



# Upcoming Gardening Events



- Thursday 1/29: Keeping the Charles Clean: A Conversation on Stormwater Innovation in Watertown (Charles River Watershed Association)
- Saturday 1/31: Winter seed sowing workshop (native plants)
- Thursday 2/5: Walker Pond Community Meeting #3 (City of Watertown)
- Saturday 2/8: Winter planning for growing vegetables presentation
- Saturday 3/14: 3rd Annual Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Spring Cleanup



To register and for more information, visit

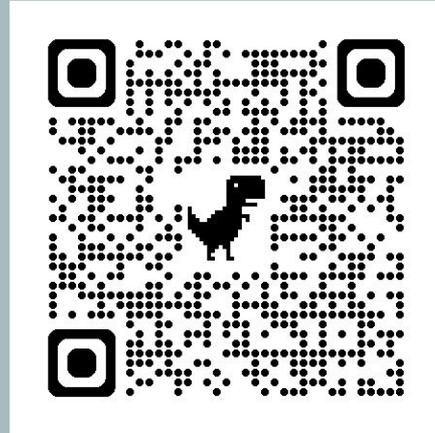
[watertowngardens.org/events](http://watertowngardens.org/events)

# Thank You



Dragon Boat Sign  
Ups!

Donate to help us  
reach 401c status!



[watertowngardens.org](http://watertowngardens.org)

[caawatertown.org](http://caawatertown.org)

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