

Baby greens, micro-greens and sprouts are dressing up salads and main dishes in many favorite upscale restaurants these days. Area growers are finding niches by growing and supplying these crops to chefs looking for a dash of extra flavor, texture and color in their dishes.

These young, tender plants are grown from a variety of garden plants and harvested anywhere from newly germinated seedlings to 4" plants. Sprouts are the youngest and smallest of these little 'greens'. The seed, root and shoot are eaten. Baby greens are the largest, and have usually attained a height of 4 inches before they are harvested by snipping them at the shoot base.

Micro-greens are tender, two inch tall plants that are harvested when the first 'true' leaves appear. When the shoot emerges, the first leaves to appear are called 'seed' leaves, or cotyledons. Most of these cotyledons look the same on all the different plants. The next leaves to appear are the 'true' leaves and they are characteristic of that specific plant crop.

Chefs use these little greens to add unexpected dimensions to their creations with flavors that are often described as spicy, sweet or tangy. Many different crops are used for color accent such as the red or purple leaf vegetable varieties. Up to 100 different crop varieties are successfully being grown and used by area businesses, and these often arrive at restaurants with a price tag of \$30 to \$50 per pound!

Can you flavor and garnish your home cuisine and eat like the rich and famous? Certainly. Try planting your garden vegetable seeds a little thicker next time. Thin them to the suggested spacing by carefully removing some little 2" plants with needle nose scissors. Voila! You have just harvested your micro-greens to use for dinner.

Some quick growing plants include cabbage, beet, kale, mustard, radish and Swiss chard. Some other tasty vegetables to plant and thin are carrots, broccoli, spinach, basil, sweet pea and onion. These will usually be ready for thinning anywhere from one to three weeks. Just be careful not to disturb the vegetable plants being left in the ground to grow on to maturity.

For more information go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hsl164> or call UF Master Gardeners. 752-5384  
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