

# Amaranth

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*Amaranthus spp.* (Amaranthaceae)

## Fast Facts:

Acres in Washington: less than 50 Number of Growers: less than 10 Per Acre Value:
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## Description of crop:

Amaranth is a genus of herbs. Not all amaranth plants are cultivated. Most of the species from *Amaranthus* are summer annual weeds and are commonly referred to as pigweeds. You can identify an amaranth plant by its broad leaves that produce clover-like flowers. The leaves come in many colors, including white, green, orange, pink and red. Certain amaranth varieties are considered vegetables and are grown strictly for their leaves. Leafy amaranth, also called Chinese spinach, is a warm season, bushy, green-colored plant which has leaves that can be eaten and tastes similar to spinach. It is harvested by pulling the tops out or by partial leaf removal for successive harvests. Harvest should be done every 7-10 days to encourage new shoots. Other amaranth varieties are grown only for their seeds and used as grain. Amaranth seed is similar to buckwheat and quinoa, and is high in protein. The seeds are roughly the size of poppy seeds and a plant typically produces 40,000-60,000 seeds during its lifetime. These seeds and the products made from them can be purchased at health and natural food stores. The seeds can be toasted, used in snacks and cereals, ground into flour, cooked with other grains or added to soups and stews as a thickener. There is interest in amaranth since it is gluten-free and provides an alternative for people with wheat and gluten allergies.

Due to its nutritional value, it is becoming more popular as a food additive in the United States. Farmers in a few states now grow amaranth but it is still not found in mainstream markets. It is being grown in Illinois, Nebraska and Colorado. In Washington it is grown on very limited acreage and is used for local and fresh markets.

## Key pests:

Weeds are the biggest pest in amaranth production. This includes lambsquarter, pigweeds, kochia, cheatgrass and various grasses. The insect pests that affect amaranth are lygus bugs and blister beetles. Amaranth does get fungal diseases, some of which can be significant, but no fungicides are labeled. In wet soils, seedlings may die from soil pathogens causing "damping off." Various root and stem rots can contribute to lodging late in the season if soils are wet in August. No viruses have been noted on amaranth, and no serious bacterial diseases have been seen.

## Key pesticides:

No herbicides are labeled for amaranth. Although cover crops and no-till planting can help prevent weed seeds from starting, amaranth seedlings grow slowly the first few weeks and are easily overtaken by early weeds. Once amaranth gets to be 6 to 10 inches tall, it will begin growing rapidly, and can shade out and outcompete late emerging weeds. There are no synthetic insecticides labeled for amaranth, but various organic insecticides can be used, including certain pyrethrin and Bt products. There are no fungicides labeled for amaranth.

**Critical pest**

**control issues:** Growers should choose disease and pest resistant varieties when possible.

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**Location of production:** Kitsap county



