

swiss chard gratin

My love affair with Swiss chard began with this simple, classic preparation.

■ SERVES 6 ■

- 2 pounds (12–16 stems with leaves) ruby, green, or rainbow chard, stems sliced and leaves cut into 1-inch ribbons
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 onion, halved and sliced
- ¼ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup grated Gruyère
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup dried bread crumbs

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Swiss chard or chard is actually a beet. Botanists distinguish among three major types of beets: *Beta vulgaris* ssp. includes the familiar beet we eat in borscht as well as the sugar beet; *Beta vulgaris* ssp. Maritima is the wild sea-beet, which may be the original beet; and *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *cicla* is Swiss chard, possibly the oldest of the cultivated beets. Chard is also variously known as white beet, strawberry spinach, seakale beet, leaf beet, Sicilian beet, spinach beet, Chilean beet, Roman kale, perpetual spinach, and silverbeet.

- 1** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the chard stems and cook for 2 minutes. Add the leaves and continue to cook for another minute. Drain well.
- 2** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 1½-quart casserole or 9- by 13-inch baking dish with butter.
- 3** Melt the butter over medium heat in a medium saucepan. Add the onion and sauté until soft, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the flour to form a paste. Whisk in the milk and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and stir in the cheese. Season with salt and pepper and remove from the heat. Fold in the chard.
- 4** Transfer the chard mixture to the prepared casserole dish. Sprinkle the bread crumbs on top.
- 5** Bake for 25 to 35 minutes, until the sauce is bubbling and the top is browned. Serve hot.