

Brassicas are a favorite of many gardeners. Cabbage is usually transplanted to the garden as a young seedling. Some varieties require soil temperatures as high as 27°C to achieve a high seed germination percentage. The days-to-maturity noted on seed packets is usually from transplant date (not seeding or germination date). Cabbage is frost hardy, and can handle a light frost without protection, and, as is true of most brassicas, cool weather and light frosts actually make the leaves 'sweeter' or 'milder'. When transplanting your seedlings to the garden, be sure to envision their mature size; and allow plenty of room for them to grow. One to two feet (31-61 cm) is suggested, depending on the variety, with about 3 feet (91cm) between rows. Cabbage likes a slightly acidic soil (pH 6-6.5).

Cabbage is shallow rooted, so be sure to take care and do not cultivate too deeply. To control disease, try not to grow cabbage, or any other Brassica family members (broccoli, cauliflower, kale) in the same location year after year. Brassicas are all generally heavy feeders, requiring a lot of nitrogen for optimal growth. Incorporate compost or well rotted manure into your soil. If a general (18-18-18) fertilizer is normally used on the garden, side-dressing with a high nitrogen fertilizer once the plants are growing may be something to consider.

Broccoli too, is usually transplanted to the garden as a young seedling. The broccoli plant is large, so be sure to space your seedlings accordingly; 18-24 inches (45-60 cm) apart and keep your rows 3 feet (90 cm) apart. Broccoli grows best in cool conditions. Harvesting the main head before the real heat of summer hits is preferred. Broccoli goes to flower quickly if the weather is hot. After the main central head is harvested, the plant begins to produce 'side shoots' which will continue to supply you with broccoli until the really cold weather hits. Harvest these regularly, especially in hot weather. Broccoli is frost hardy and can be left in the garden well into the fall, until the actual plant freezes.

Brussels Sprouts, as well, are usually transplanted to the garden as a young seedling. Like Cabbage and broccoli, they like slightly acidic soil (pH 6.5). These plants are hardy. The sprouts themselves are typically not harvested until after the first few fall frosts, or even wet snows. The cold weather improves the flavor of the sprouts and renders them not so bitter. The plants are large; leave about 18 inches (45 cm) between plants and 3 feet (90 cm) between rows. As the sprouts begin to form at the base of the stem; remove the lower leaves. In early fall, pinch out the center of the plant. This encourages faster upper sprout development. Sprouts are harvested from the bottom up when they are about an inch (2.5 cm) in diameter, in several pickings.

Kale is very popular. It is easy to grow and very nutritious. It too is frost hardy, and can be harvested even after the first wet snows. Kale starts producing mature leaves quite quickly (50-60 days). Continuously harvesting the larger leaves from the plant will provide fresh kale all season.

Cauliflower is not quite as frost hardy as other members of the cabbage family, and is usually transplanted to the garden. Many varieties available are good self-wrappers. Tying the leaves over the cauliflower curd when it is about 'fist-size' is a good practice. Direct sunlight on the developing head causes discoloration and 'open' growth (you want your heads to remain 'tight'). Light and/or heat will cause your cauliflower head to bolt. Harvest the cauliflower head when mature.

Collard greens are fast growing and have a mild cabbage-like flavour. They are a 'non-heading' cabbage. Try using the leaves for cabbage rolls, or where-ever you would use kale?? You may be pleasantly surprised!

A major 'pest' of all brassica varieties is the Cabbage Moth, or more specifically, their caterpillars or larvae stage. This is the green caterpillar that eats holes in all the leaves. One way to prevent this is to grow your brassicas under floating row covers. This prevents the moth from being able to lay its' eggs on your crop. Another is by spraying the plants with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). Bt is a naturally occurring bacteria. It only works on caterpillars, and only if they ingest it. It is considered safe for everything else. Organic gardeners have been using this as an insecticide for decades.

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