

# “Cole Crop” Vegetables



Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower and kohlrabi are often referred to as "Cole crops". Cole is the German word for cabbage (as in "Cole slaw"). These crops are hardy and grow best in cool weather.

## SITE SELECTION

Cole crops can be planted just about anywhere in the garden as long as they get 6 to 8 hours of sun each day. When choosing a site, consider how long each crop will occupy the spot you give it and how successive plantings will be rotated. Crop rotation is a must for these vegetables.

## SOIL

As long as soil is well tilled or spayed, Cole crops will produce well in nearly any soil type. These veggies grow best in loose soil that's rich in organic matter like old shredded leaves, manure, compost or straw. Even if you've turned over your soil with a spade or tiller, always work your planting area one more time on planting day to add fresh air to the bed and loosen soil.

Spring Cole crops thrive in sandy soil that drains well. Raised beds and organic soil amendments can help prevent water logging from spring rains, especially for clay-heavy soil. Fall crops prefer heavier soil because it retains moisture better, and rainfall at the end of the growing season can be sparse.

Have soil tested every couple of years to determine acidity or alkalinity. Cole crops grow best in slightly acidic soil with a pH of 6.0 to 6.8. Once you test your soil, you'll know whether it needs added lime, sulfur or other minerals. Autumn is the best time for soil testing and for taking necessary corrective measures. The new season's crops will be that much better if you take care of the pH 4-5 months before planting.

## CROP ROTATION

Do not plant any member of the cabbage family in the same place in successive years. Also, rotate if you plant more than one crop the same season. Insects and diseases that bother Cole crops remain in the soil, so it's best to plant them where beans, peas, tomatoes or other vegetables grew previously.

## SPRING & FALL PLANTINGS

Maintain a steady supply of vegetables by planting both spring and fall crops. Set plants out in early spring once the ground is dry enough and the danger of a hard freeze has passed. Allow 4-6 weeks from planting the seeds indoors to transplanting.



## TIPS ABOUT BROCCOLI

- Two crops a year are usually possible
- Set out plants 3–4 weeks before last frost
- Space 6–18" apart, 20–36" between rows.
- Fertilizer: 3-4 lbs. of 5-10-10 per 100 sf.
- Protect from hard frost, provide windbreak to reduce shock and moisture loss.
- Direct seed broccoli for fall crops. Thin when plants are 4" tall. In rich soil.
- Side-dress with 1 TBLS high-nitrogen fertilizer 3 weeks after transplanting or 5 weeks after sowing seeds.
- For best quality, harvest when head buds are firm and tight. If they start to separate or yellow, harvest immediately.

## TIPS ABOUT BRUSSELS SPROUTS

- Fall harvested crops are generally more successful than summer ones. Brussels sprouts improve in flavor after a light frost.
- Work a balanced fertilizer such as 5-10-10 into the soil at 2-4 lbs. per 100 sf.
- Raised beds can help prevent the freeze-thaw cycle that rots plants.
- When transplanting, space plants 14-24" apart.
- Side-dress plants once a month during the growing season with a balanced fertilizer.
- Mulch to retain moisture in summer heat and to control weeds.
- When sprouts reach half of desired size, remove lowest leaves on plant to enable sprouts to attain maximum size.
- To induce early maturity, pinch out the growing tip sprouts have formed on 10-12" of the stem. This directs the plant's energy into making more leaves, less stalk and earlier, larger sprouts.
- Best harvest is after a fall frost. Harvest sprouts from bottom up when they're 1 to 1-½" diam.
- Harvest as needed. Plants are tolerant of light frosts.

## TIPS ABOUT CABBAGE

- Cabbage grows best when it matures in cool weather. Late-maturing varieties are best for fall harvests.
- Chinese cabbage is best as a fall harvest.
- A week before planting, mix 3-4 shovelfuls of aged manure or compost into the bed for each plant. Or, use balanced fertilizer (5-10-10) at 3-4 lbs. per 100 sf.
- For spring crops, set out transplants 2-3 weeks before last expected frost date. Space early-maturing cabbages 12-15" apart, and later-maturing types 18-24" apart.
- For fall crops, plant seeds ¼" deep, 1-½ to 2" apart. For Chinese cabbage, ¼" - ½" deep and 3" apart. Thin when plants are 4-5" tall so they are 18-24" apart (for Chinese cabbage, 12-15").
- A month after transplanting, side-dress cabbages with about 1 pound of 10-10-10 or per 25 linear feet. Side-dress Chinese cabbage with ½ pound of 10-10-10 per 15 linear feet when plants are 4-6" tall. Repeat every 3 weeks.
- Use mulch to retain moisture.
- Start harvesting when cabbage heads are firm and softball size. Cut head from stem with a sharp knife and discard outer leaves. Begin harvesting Chinese cabbage when leaves are 10 inches tall and still loose or wait until heads form.
- For maximum storage time, harvest late in the season before hard freezes and keep heads in a cold, moist area.