

How to Grow

Cabbages.

The oldest cultivated vegetable was the pea but the Cabbage was not far behind. Cabbages were probably domesticated before 1000BC somewhere in Europe. It has been documented as part of the cuisine since Antiquity and has been described as a table luxury in the Roman Empire. By the Middle Ages it had become a prominent part of the European diet as shown in various manuscript illustrations. New varieties were developed during the Renaissance, and the Savoy cabbage in the 16th century.

From the health point of view the humble cabbage plays a very healthy part of our diet. Raw cabbage contains Vit C: Vit B3: Vit A: thiamine -Vit B1: riboflavin - Vit B2: pantothenic acid - B5 and Vit K. It contains twice the amount of Vit C than an orange or an apple and four times that of a potato. Highly nutritious, cabbage can be stored for some months without any processing and by fermenting into sauerkraut it becomes a foodstuff that will store for a year. Cabbage remains high in Vit C even when processed which is the reason why the Dutch navy used to take sauerkraut to sea, while the British navy took limes to prevent scurvy.

Cabbages are easy to grow, nutritious and tasty. They come in all different shapes, sizes and colours and can be harvested at all times of the year. Use raw in salads or coleslaw and in many other dishes from soups to bubble and squeak.

Sowing times. All groups are grown in the same way, only the sowing times vary.

Summer Cabbage: Sow from late February/early March under cloches or similar cover. Transplant May/June

Winter Cabbage: Sow April/May - transplant late June/July

Spring Cabbage: Sow July/August - transplant September/October

Chinese Cabbage are cultivated differently

Sowing Outdoors:

Traditionally cabbages are grown in a seed bed- away from the main plot if possible, then are transplanted later in the season. Reason - sowing in the main plot would take too much room early in the season, when fast maturing crops such as lettuce, radish etc could be grown.

Site: need a sunny site with firm soil. If possible prepare the ground in the autumn by adding well rotted manure or garden compost - leave over winter to consolidate. Before

sowing make sure that the soil is well firmed by shuffling along the surface with your heels. Then rake level, creating a fine texture.

Make a drill 1cm (1/2inch) deep then sow seeds thinly along it. ** Take care not to plant in the same spot as the previous year. Expected germination time is 7-12 weeks.

Transplant when young plants have 5-6 true leaves. Place in their final growing position - spacing:

Compact - 30cm (1ft) apart

Larger - 45cm (18inches) apart

Spring - 10cm (4inches) apart in rows 30cm (1ft) apart. Thin out plants to 30cm(1ft) apart in late February/early March.

** Do check your seed packet for spacing as this does depend on the variety being grown.

- Water plants well the day before planting out.
- Set plants in their new hole - lowest leaves at ground level. Plant in **firmly**.
- Puddle in plants with plenty of water (means filling hole with water several times before adding soil).

Cabbages like to be planted near beans, beetroot, celery, mint, thyme, sage, onions, rosemary, dill, chamomile, potatoes, oregano, hyssop, nasturtiums and coriander.

They do not like to be planted near rue, strawberries, tomatoes or garlic.

Water in prolonged dry spells and thoroughly soak every 10 days. When heads begin to form generous watering will improve head size. **Feed** summer and winter cabbages with a high nitrogen fertiliser before they become too large.

Sowing Indoors. If you want just a few cabbages or have limited space then sow in modular trays, 1 seed per tray then move the tray outdoors, or grow in the propagator or on the windowsill, potting on when they become large enough. This might happen a couple of times and transplant outdoors later.

Cabbages are not suitable for growing in growing bags but could grow one or two in a deep, large container.

Harvesting. Cabbages usually take 4 to 6 months to reach maturity depending on the variety grown. Once they have reached the size you want and have formed a firm head then cut through the stem just above ground level. With spring and summer cabbages if

you cut a 1cm (1/2inch) cross into the stump of the cabbages they should, hopefully, produce a second much smaller cabbage.

Winter cabbages, both red and white, can be harvested in November and stored for winter use. Cut off roots and stem, remove outer leaves then place in a straw-lined box in a cool, dry place. The crop should last until March.

Pests and Remedies

Caterpillars: a number of different types of caterpillars will feast on cabbage, but most common are those of the Cabbage White Butterfly. These can easily be seen on leaves, and will eat the leaves and bore into the heart of the cabbage.

Remedy: If only a mild attack on a few plants then pick off the caterpillars by hand. Cover plants with insect-proof mesh or fine netting (5-7mm) as this mesh can prevent eggs being laid on the leaves.

Clubroot: Roots of plants are swollen and distorted. Leaves are pale and yellow and wilt. Plants may die.

Remedy: Improve the drainage of the soil and add lime to make the soil more alkeline. Do not grow in affected soil. *** If you have clubroot infected soil there is an excellent piece in the article "How to Grow Cabbages" in <https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable/cabbage-growing/> Under the item Cabbage Pests and Problems there is a link to growing cabbages on clubroot infected soil.

Slugs and Snails: Feed on young seedlings leaving a trail of slime on crops and soil.

Remedy: Beer traps, sawdust, eggshell barriers, copper tape, biological controls.

Birds: These are a problem, attacking seedlings.

Remedy: Cover with fleece or netting.

Growing for our Annual Show:

Cabbages - Green and White: Shapely, fresh and solid hearts with surrounding leaves perfect and the bloom intact. Good colour. Size according to cultivar. Leave about 3inches of stalk, pointed or round. Display with heads to the front.

Cabbages - Red: Solid heads, well coloured, shapely fresh with bloom intact and free from blemish. Size and condition according to cultivar. Display with heads to the front.

Refs: www.rhs.org.uk/vegetables/cabbages/grow-your-own

www.allotment-garden.org/vegetables/cabbage-growing.

I don't usually include a recipe in these articles, but a lot of people dislike the cabbage smell that is left behind after cooking. This recipe is from John Harrison of the Allotment Society. He claims that it is delicious and definitely avoids the "cabbage smell" in the kitchen. It is as yet untested by myself.

- Shred green cabbage leaves
- Take a heavy pan with a tight fitting lid and melt a good knob of butter (need enough butter to coat the cabbage).
- Add cabbage, stirring and mixing to thoroughly coat the cabbage with the butter. Grind black pepper over cabbage. (your choice if you add salt).
- Add a couple of dessertspoons of water and one of lemon juice.
- Keep stirring around to prevent cabbage sticking or burning.
- After a couple of minutes turn off heat, put lid firmly on pan.
- A couple of minutes later your cabbage is ready to serve. No cabbage smell and no over-cooked soggy greens sitting on your plate.

