

ARUGULA

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Arugula, both *Eruca sativa* (garden arugula) and *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* (wild arugula), is also known as rocket salad or roquette. It is a cool season green of the cabbage family and is related to cabbage, kale, cauliflower, and broccoli. Cultivation of arugula dates back to Roman times, when the leaves were used in salads, and the seeds were used to flavor oils. Arugula is rich in potassium and vitamin C.

Choosing Varieties

There are several of varieties of arugula to choose from that grow well in Missouri and other Midwest states.

- Arugula ‘Astro’ (early, mild taste)
- Sylvetta (wild arugula)
- Rocket (early, peppery flavor)

The wild variety of arugula, Sylvetta, is slower growing than garden arugula and has smaller leaves with a spicier taste.

It is recommended to try multiple varieties to determine overall plant performance and personal preference.

Planting Tips

Arugula is a cool season green that is able to survive a light freeze. It can be spring or fall planted.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in early April for a spring crop or in mid-August for a fall crop. Seeds can be planted up to ½ inch deep in rows that are about 1 foot apart. Planting in a raised bed or row can help maintain higher-quality greens by improving drainage. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet.

To extend the harvesting season of arugula, plant every 2-3 weeks until early summer. Plants can be thinned over the season to a final spacing of about 6 inches between plants.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Arugula seeds should be planted in well-drained soils and would benefit from the addition of nutrients either in the form of a complete fertilizer or aged compost.



To prevent weeds, retain moisture, and to keep soil temperatures down, mulch can be applied around the plants. Arugula plants should receive enough water to keep them vigorously growing without waterlogging the soil.

Generally arugula is pest free. However, flea beetles can damage arugula by eating holes in the young leaves. Flea beetles can be controlled with chemicals containing the organic compound pyrethrin (be sure to follow product labels).

Cabbage worms can also be a pest of arugula. If the population of small green caterpillars is too numerous to hand pick, an insecticide with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can be used like Dipel and Thuricide.

Harvesting

As soon as the leaves are large enough to use, arugula can be harvested by cutting individual leaves as they mature or entire plants. If the leaves are cut 1 inch above the ground, the plant will send up new leaves. When grown in warm weather, arugula leaves turn bitter and go to seed.

Seed Sources

Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny’s Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Burpee Seeds (1-800-888-1447, burpee.com) are two companies that sell arugula varieties.