

BROCCOLI

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens



Overview

Broccoli, *Brassica oleracea* var. *italica*, is a cool season vegetable of the cabbage family and is closely related to cauliflower, cabbage, kale, and brussel sprouts. Broccoli is a descendent from leafy forms of cabbage that originated in southern Europe. Broccoli is one of the few vegetables that is composed of flowers. It is a great source of vitamins A, C, and K as well as calcium and iron.

Choosing Varieties

There are several varieties of broccoli available that differ in days till maturity, broccoli head size, height, color, and drought resistance, as well as other traits. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

- Green Comet (early, heat tolerant)
- Green Goliath (large head size)
- Packman (dependable producer)
- Premium Crop (disease resistant)
- Purple Sprouting (purple heads)

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

Planting Tips

Broccoli is a cool season vegetable that is able to tolerate a light freeze and can be spring or fall planted.

Seeds can be started indoors under lights 4-6 weeks before the frost-free date for a spring crop or early July for a fall harvest. Seeds should be planted about ¼-½ inch deep in containers or cell packs with well-drained potting soil. The potting medium should not be allowed to dry completely. Seedlings should be hardened off before transplanting by setting plants outside in the shade a week before planting.

For a spring harvest, transplants can be planted in the garden in mid-to-late March in Missouri. When planting for a fall crop, be sure to choose quickly maturing varieties and set out transplants in early August to get a crop before a hard freeze. Broccoli seedlings should be planted 16-18 inches apart in rows that are 2-3 feet apart. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on

the seed packet.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Broccoli 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. Since broccoli has a shallow root system, avoid sandy or shallow soils. Water is important for the establishment of transplants and the formation of heads.

Cabbage worms are a common pest of broccoli. If the population of small green caterpillars is too numerous to hand pick, an insecticide with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can be used such as Dipel and Thuricide (be sure to follow product labels). Aphids can be controlled with insecticidal soaps. To prevent diseases like clubroot and black rot, be sure to rotate members of the *Brassica* genus with other crops each year.

Harvesting

The broccoli heads should be harvested with a sharp knife while the buds are still tight before any yellow flowers show. Leave about 6 inches of the stem attached so the plant will continue to produce smaller edible side heads called “broccolettes.”

Seed Sources

Broccoli seedlings are available in the spring at local garden centers. Seeds can be ordered from mail order companies via phone or website. Johnny’s Selected Seeds (1-877-564-6697, johnnyseeds.com) and Reimer Seeds (reimerseeds.com) are two companies that sell broccoli varieties.

Written by Catherine Bohnert, Horticulture Specialist. Additional guidesheets at www.jeffersonfarm.org. Copyright 2008.