

CABBAGE

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Cabbage, *Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata*, is a cool season vegetable of the cabbage family and is closely related to broccoli, cauliflower, kale, and brussel sprouts. Cabbages are diverse in their appearance coming in round, flattened, and pointed forms; there are savoy (have wrinkled leaves) and smooth types as well as red and green varieties. Cabbage is rich in vitamin C.

Choosing Varieties

There are many varieties of cabbage available that differ in days till maturity, head size, head shape, color, and disease resistance, as well as other traits. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

- Golden Acre (quite sweet, disease resistant)
- King Slaw (good kraut cabbage)
- Ruby Perfection (red, uniform head)
- Savoy King (high yielding, wrinkled leaves)
- Stonehead (early, resists splitting)

Head splitting is caused from the build up of pressure from taking up an excessive amount of water when the cabbage head is solid. To prevent splitting be sure to harvest the heads upon maturity. Some varieties are resistant to splitting.

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

Planting Tips

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

For best results, seedlings should be transplanted into the garden instead of direct seeding. In Missouri, seedlings can be planted mid-to-late March or for a fall crop, late July to mid-August.

Seeds can be started indoors under lights 6-8 weeks before the frost-free date in the spring or around July 1 for a fall crop. Seeds should be planted ¼ inch deep in individual containers or cell packs with well-drained potting soil. Seedlings should be hardened off before transplanting by setting plants outside in the shade a week before planting.



Cabbage seedlings should be planted at a spacing of 1-2 feet apart within the row with about 2 feet between rows. The closer the cabbages are planted, the smaller the heads.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Cabbage 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. Cabbage plants should be given enough water to prevent wilting without waterlogging the soil.

Cabbage worms are a common pest of cabbage. 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). To prevent diseases like clubroot and black rot, be sure to rotate members of the *Brassica* genus with other crops each year.

Harvesting

The cabbage head can be harvested any time after head formation when it is solid and feels firm. If the plant is left, cabbage sprouts that are 2-4 inches in diameter will form on the stem and can be harvested when firm to the touch.

Seed Sources

Cabbage 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 (www.reimerseeds.com) are two companies that sell cabbage varieties.

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