

CAULIFLOWER

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens



Overview

Cauliflower, *Brassica oleracea* var. *botrytis*, is a cool season vegetable of the cabbage family and is closely related to broccoli, cabbage, kale, and brussel sprouts. Cauliflower was grown in home gardens in the early history of the United States (including Thomas Jefferson's gardens in Monticello), but did not become a commercial crop until the early 1920's. Cauliflower is rich in vitamins A and C.

Choosing Varieties

There are several varieties of cauliflower available that differ in cauliflower head (curd) size, height, color, and disease resistance, as well as other traits. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

- First White hybrid (early)
- Fremont (self-blanching, dependable)
- Snow Crown (early, productive)
- Graffiti (purple, best for fall harvest)

The white curds form in the absence of light and should be blanched. When curd is about 3 inches in diameter, top leaves of the cauliflower plant should be secured with clothespins or rubber bands to block out the sunlight. Self-blanching varieties have leaves that naturally shade the curd.

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

Planting Tips

Cauliflower is a cool season vegetable that is able to tolerate a light frost 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 in late July to mid-August. When planting a fall crop, be sure to choose quickly maturing varieties to ensure a crop before a hard freeze.

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.

Cauliflower seedlings should be planted 8-24 inches apart within the row with about 3 feet between rows.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Cauliflower seedlings 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. It is important for cauliflower to grow vigorously until harvest. If the plant becomes stressed, the flowering process will be aborted and result in crop failure. Cauliflower should be monitored for watering, giving it ample moisture during curd formation without waterlogging the soils.

Cabbage worms are a common pest of cauliflower. 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 cauliflower curd should be harvested with a sharp knife 7-12 days after the blanching process begins. The curd should be firm and compact.

Seed Sources

Cauliflower 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 Burpee Seeds (1-800-888-1447, burpee.com) are two companies that sell cauliflower varieties.

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