

KOHLRABI

Gardening tips provided by
Jefferson Farm & Gardens

Overview

Kohlrabi, *Brassica oleracea* var. *gongylodes*, is a cool season vegetable of the cabbage family and is closely related to cauliflower, cabbage, kale, and brussel sprouts. Kohlrabi is often mistaken as a root crop; the bulbous portion that is eaten is actually a swollen stem that grows above ground. Kohlrabi is rich in vitamin C.

Choosing Varieties

There are a few varieties of kohlrabi available that differ in days till maturity, color, and sweetness, as well as other traits. A few recommended varieties for Missouri and other Midwest states are:

- Early Purple Vienna (purple skin, white flesh)
- Eder (early, white skin)
- Grand Duke (white skin, sweet flavor)
- Kolibri (purple skin, large bulb)

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

Planting Tips

Kohlrabi is a cool season vegetable that is able to survive a freeze. It can be spring or fall planted.

In Missouri, seeds can be sown in late March to mid-April for a spring crop or in July for a fall crop. They should be planted no more than ½ inch deep in rows that are about 18 inches apart. Once the plants are 3-4 inches tall, they should be thinned for a final spacing of about 4 inches. Sowing instructions for a particular variety can usually be found on the seed packet. To extend the harvesting season of kohlrabi, plant repeatedly every two weeks.

Soil Fertility and Pest Control

Kohlrabi 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. Kohlrabi plants should receive enough water to keep them vigorously growing without waterlogging the soil.



Cabbage worms are a common pest of kohlrabi. 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).

Flea beetles are pests to kohlrabi by eating holes in the young leaves, slowing growth. Flea beetles can be controlled with chemicals containing the organic compound pyrethrin.

To prevent diseases like clubroot and black rot, be sure to rotate members of the *Brassica* genus with other crops each year.

Harvesting

Kohlrabi matures about two months after planting and can be harvested when the stems are 2-3 inches in diameter by pulling up the plant or cutting off the stem. The young leaves can be used like other greens. If stems are allowed to grow beyond maturity, they can become tough and woody with a bitter flavor.

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 Reimer Seeds (www.reimerseeds.com) are two companies that sell kohlrabi varieties.