

How to Grow Brussel Sprouts

Brussel Sprouts are a slow growing vegetable that are frost resistant and provide a good crop over the winter months. Each sprout resembles a small cabbage.

Preparation: Brussel Sprouts are part of the Brassica group of crops and to help avoid disease and pests they should not be planted in soil which has had other Brassicas (e.g. cabbage, broccoli, turnips, kale, cauliflowers etc) grown in it within at least the last 2 years.

Dig some organic compost into the soil a few weeks before planting to help the soils moisture retention properties.

Sowing: Sow your seeds in seed pots in mid spring to late summer. Germination takes about 3-10 days and occurs above 50 deg F. Plant out your seedlings when they are about 5-6 weeks old and about 6 inches in height. You should plan the timing of your sowing so that the seedlings are planted out about 3 months before the first frost.

Plant the seedlings about 40cm (15 inches) apart and if planting in rows then space the rows about 75-85cm apart (30 - 35 inches). Apply a fertilizer and water at the time of planting.

Position: Brussels are a cool weather crop that grow best at around 60-65 deg F. They will grow well in temperatures up to 75 deg F. Warm temperatures will cause the sprouts to open up and lose their firmness. Warm weather also causes the flavor of the sprout to be more intense.

Soil type: Brussel Sprouts grow well in well drained but moisture retaining soil.

Tending: Brussel Sprouts have a shallow root system and so care must be taken not to damage the roots when maintaining the soil and weeds. A nitrogen fertilizer should be applied to the soil every 3 weeks through the growing season.

Brussel Sprouts need a large amount of water but do not like standing water. Lighter soils will require more frequent watering than heavier soils. Ensure to water the crop adequately during the growing season as the plants require water for growth and sprout development.

Removing the growing tip of the plant about a month before the harvesting date will result in greater yields as the plant will divert energy from leaf growth into developing the Brussel Sprouts.

Harvesting: The sprouts form in the leaf axils (the point between where the leaf joins the stem) and can be harvested around 3 months after planting. Pick the sprouts when they are about 2-2.5cm in diameter or as soon as the lower leaves on the plant start to yellow.

Pick or cut the sprout off the stem and remove any loose leaves from the sprout. Store the sprouts in a cool dark place. Like most things sprouts taste best when they are fresh.

Sprouts can be frozen. When cooking sprouts make a cross shaped incision across the base of the sprout as this ensures the sprout is cooked evenly through into the middle and so the sprout does not have to be 'overcooked and soggy' on the outside to ensure the middle is cooked.