

# How to Grow Collard, or Collard Greens

As a member of the cabbage family, Collards plants are much less known. Collard is closely related to Kale. They are strong flavored, open leafed cabbage. They do not form a large, round head. Despite being easier to grow than regular cabbage, why isn't it popular? The answer is taste. Collard greens have a strong taste, and can be quite bitter, especially in the warmer weather.

**Sowing Collard Seeds:** There are many places in this country where you can grow a spring and a fall crop. All members of the cabbage family can withstand frosts and freezes. Plan to place your seeds or seedlings in your garden as one of the first crops. If you time your crop right, you will have a couple weeks in the middle of summers' heat and humidity when you are not growing Collards or Kale. This is actually good, as these plants do not like high heat and dry conditions.

**TIP:** If you plant early in the year, consider using a raised row or bed to allow better drainage during early spring rains.

**Indoors:** Start your spring crop indoors four to six weeks before planting outdoors. Plan to plant your seedlings outdoors very early in the season. It can be planted outdoors before the last frost date for your area. Plant seeds in containers 1/2 inch deep, in sterile starting mix. Water thoroughly once, then lightly after the seeds have sprouted. Provide plenty of sunlight or artificial grow lights so the plants do not become spindly. Boost your plants health with a light application of liquid fertilizer once or twice during this period.

**Outdoors:** Collard seeds can be direct sowed into the row, or seeded in a separate area and transplanted to the row after a few weeks. We recommend planting them together in a seedbed, and transplanting the seedlings. This allows for better control of the spacing of your seedlings. This is a common method for the second planting. Plant seeds 1/2 inch deep. Water well and make sure to keep the top level of soil moist, especially during the drier mid-summer planting.

Whether direct seeding or transplanting, make the final spacing 18 to 24 inches apart, in rows three feet apart. The outer leaves of a healthy plant will spread and cover a lot of space.

**Tip:** For direct seeding, prepare the soil first, then, place tomato cages (to mark your planting) 18 to 24 inches apart. Sow several seeds inside the ring of the cage. Thin to two plants a week after germination and to one plant after a couple of weeks. This avoids transplant shock, and affords proper spacing for maximum growth. Remove the tomato cages after the seedlings have begun to grow.

**How to Grow Collard Plants:** Growing Collard greens is easy. Because Collards do not form heads, it is easier to grow than cabbage. The young leaves can be harvested as the plant grows for salads, soups and other recipes. Collard plants prefer full sunlight. Collards will grow in average and poorer soils. But like any plant, they respond favorably to richer soil high in nutrients. Note: Make sure to provide plenty of nitrogen for a greener crop. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. Dry conditions lead to bitter vegetables in the entire vegetable world. Collards are no exception.

**Days to Maturity:** Collard greens are normally harvested in 70 - 80 days. The tender young leaves can be harvested as soon as they reach a size that is easy for picking.

**Hardiness:** Collards, as previously mentioned, are among the hardiest of annuals. The plants can withstand temperatures into the upper 20's. You know you have a hardy plant when you go out to the garden in December, brush a little snow away, and harvest some vegetables.