

How to Grow Red Cabbage

Red cabbage makes a lovely addition to your kitchen garden. Its broad, colorful leaves and crisp textures can really dress up your growing space in fall or spring – and it's delicious, too! What's more, this wonderful vegetable is easy to grow. And if you're just starting your garden, or opening up a new area for planting, red cabbage is a great crop for loosening the soil because it sends strong roots deep down that help to break it up.

Red cabbage's silvery-green leaves with deep purple veins add color and form to your fall or early spring garden. As red cabbage matures, it'll form a head in the center of the plant. After removing the white core of the cabbage, slice the vegetable into long strips.

Gardeners living in warm climates, like in Florida or California, can plant cabbage anywhere from October to December. If you live in a cooler part of the country and would like to grow your cabbage for fall harvest, you need to consider when your area usually gets hit with its first fall frost (on average). Once you know that date, check how long your red cabbage variety of choice takes to mature, then count back that number from your average first frost date. (That's when you should plant.)

If you're planting for spring, start your red cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* (Capitata Group)) from seed 8-12 weeks before the last spring frost, and transplant the seedlings into your kitchen garden 4 weeks before the last frost of the season.

Whenever you plant, protect your transplants from cutworms by surrounding them with a cardboard barrier. It's easy to do: Just take a cardboard roll from bathroom tissue or paper towel and cut it into 2- to 3-inch-long rings. Then dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball, but no deeper. Place the seedling into the hole, and place the roll around the seedling, with about half the ring still rising above the ground so the cutworms won't be able to crawl past the ring and damage your plant.

Cabbage is a heavy feeder, so when you're planting, be sure to fill the hole back in with some compost and a balanced fertilizer, along with a few inches of your good garden soil. Top that off with some light mulch around the cardboard roll and some water, and your cabbage will be on its way to growing big, crunchy and delicious!

As it matures, the vegetable will gradually grow a head in the center of the plant. (Kale, a close relative, won't form this head.) You can harvest your cabbage when it's small, or allow it to grow until its several inches wide. To harvest the head, use a sharp knife to cut underneath it and remove it from the plant. Some varieties will continue to produce small cabbage heads after you harvest.