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How to Grow Cabbage: The Complete Guide



Photo Credit: St-Design/Getty Images

Botanical name: *Brassica oleracea* (Capitata group)

Plant type: Vegetable

Subscription: Full Subscription

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Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Cabbages

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: April 24, 2025




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Cabbage is a cool-season vegetable suited

on how to plant, grow, and harvest this
hardy, leafy vegetable packed
with vitamins!

For some gardeners, a vegetable plot isn't complete without that ever-dependable staple: cabbage! You can plant in mid-spring, late spring, or late summer (to harvest the following year). We will show you everything you need to know to grow the perfect cabbage, from sowing to transplanting to harvesting—and everything in between!

Shredded into a slaw, stir-fried, steamed, or baked, there's not much you can't do with cabbage. And with a little planning, it's even possible to enjoy cabbages year-round by planting a carefully curated succession of varieties suited to each season. So here's how to do it!

About Cabbage

Mark Twain once said, *"Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college educa-*

is antioxidant- and nutrient-rich and a great addition to any garden! [See five reasons to eat cabbage.](#)

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That said, note that cabbage can be challenging for beginner gardeners to grow if you don't have the right conditions; it only likes cool temperatures and can be a magnet for some types of garden pests.

Rotating the cabbage crop every few years avoids the buildup of soilborne diseases.

BUY SEEDS NOW

Follow our guide to planting a successful crop in the spring or fall. We'll help you provide the diligent care that cabbage needs and set you up for success!

Read Next

- [Vegetable Gardening for Beginners: The Complete Guide](#)
- [Five Fresh Greens to Grow All Year Round](#)
- [What is Succession Planting? See How to Increase Your Harvest](#)

PLANTING

To achieve the best results, choose a planting site that receives full sun (6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight per day).

Cabbage is a heavy feeder; it quickly depletes the soil of nutrients and needs a steady supply of water and nutrients throughout its growth. Prepare the soil in advance by mixing in aged manure and/or [compost](#). Soil should also be well-draining; roots that stand in water cause heads to split or rot.

- For a summer harvest, start seeds indoors, sowing about 6 to 8 weeks before the last spring frost. [Consult our Planting Calendar for suggested dates.](#)
- For a fall harvest, directly sow seeds outdoors (or plant transplants) in mid-to-late summer. If your area is particularly hot and dry, hold off on planting until late summer. Make sure that the young plants don't dry out in the summer sun's heat!

How to Plant Cabbage

- Sow cabbage seeds $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep.
- Before planting the seedlings outdoors, [harden off](#) the plants over the course of a week.
- Transplant seedlings outdoors on a cloudy afternoon 2 to 3 weeks before the last spring frost date.
- Plant seedlings 12 to 24 inches apart in rows, depending on the size of the head desired. (Closer spacing yields smaller heads.)

Check out this video to learn how to

• • • • •

...abbages from Sowing to Harvest



GROWING

- When seedlings reach about 5 inches tall, thin to leave the desired space between them. If you wish, transplant the thinned seedlings elsewhere.
- Mulch thickly around the area to retain moisture and regulate soil temperature.
- Water 2 inches per square foot per week.
- The optimum soil temperature for growth is 60 to 65°F. Young plants exposed to temperatures below 45°F for a period of time may bolt or form loose heads. Cover plants if cold weather is expected.
- Fertilize two weeks after transplanting with a balanced (10-10-10) fertilizer.
- Three weeks later, add a nitrogen-rich

- Practice crop rotation with cabbages to avoid a buildup of soil-borne diseases.



Protect seedlings against pigeons with wire mesh, and use netting during the summer months to stop butterflies from laying their eggs on the leaves. It's also worth growing nasturtiums nearby as a sacrificial crop for cabbage worms, which will be more likely to eat the nasturtiums instead of your cabbages. Mint can be used to help deter flea beetles.

Keep cabbages watered, and weed between plants with a hoe or by hand. During exceptionally cold weather, winter cabbages may need to be protected with

“As cabbage heads mature, they become prone to splitting in response to heavy rainfall, especially following dry weather. To minimize head splitting, avoid late-season fertilization, provide adequate water throughout the growing season, and harvest heads as soon as they are firm. In addition, pruning roots with a shovel on one side of the plant, or twisting the plant after the heads have firmed, will break roots and prevent the uptake of excess water,” explains [John Schoenhals](#), [Extension Educator](#) at the Ohio State University.

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Times

There's a fantastic range of cabbage varieties to choose from, offering different shapes, colors, and textures.

- For an early harvest, try '**Primo**' or '**Stonehead**.'
- Quick-maturing '**Golden Acre**' and '**Quick Start**' yield 3-pound heads.
- For Savoy types, try '**Alcosa**', an early variety, or '**Wirosa**', a late variety that overwinters as-is in southern gardens but needs protection in the North.
- '**Early Jersey Wakefield**' resists splitting. It's an heirloom, slightly pointed, and 2- to 3-pound heads.
- '**Gonzales**' produces softball-sized heads, making it good for small gardens.
- Disease-resistant varieties include '**Blue Vantage**' and '**Cheers**'.
- If you are planting for a fall harvest, try red or Chinese cabbage. Good varieties include '**Integro**' and '**Ruby Perfection**' (reds) and '**Li Ren Choy**' (baby bok choy).

green, dark green, red, or purple. Red cabbages are popular for braising or pickling.

Some types have a smooth, almost glossy appearance, while others, like the Savoy cabbage, produce deeply crinkled leaves that are perfect for mopping up sauces or gravy.

Cabbages are grouped according to when they're harvested. Spring cabbages, which may also be harvested young as 'spring greens,' are ready from mid to late spring. Summer cabbages crop from summer into early autumn, while fall cabbages and winter varieties cover the remainder of the year.

Savoy cabbages have a long harvest period stretching from autumn all the way through winter to early spring.

Our [Garden Planner](#) can show you recommended sowing, transplanting, and harvesting times for different types of cab-

HARVESTING

- Harvest when heads reach the desired size and are firm. Mature heads left on the stem may split. Days to maturity is around 70 days for most green cabbage varieties, and most produce 1- to 3-pound heads.
- To harvest, cut each cabbage head at its base with a sharp knife. Remove any yellow leaves (retain loose green leaves; they provide protection in storage) and immediately bring the head indoors or place it in the shade. Alternatively, pull up the plant (roots and all) and hang it in a moist cellar that reaches near-freezing temperatures.
- Winter cabbages are sweeter after a light frost. Spring cabbages can be harvested young and loose as spring greens, or left to grow on to form a tight head of leaves.
- To get two crops, cut the cabbage head out of the plant, leaving the outer leaves and roots in the garden. The

heads remain. Harvest when tennis ball-size (perfect for salads!).

- After harvesting, remove the entire stem and root system from the soil to prevent disease. Only compost healthy plants; destroy any with maggot infestation.

How to Store Cabbages

- Cabbage can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, wrapped lightly in plastic. Make sure it is dry before storing. In proper root cellar conditions, cabbage will keep for up to 3 months. [See our article on root cellars.](#)
- Follow this old-time technique to get the most out of your cabbage crop:
 1. In the fall, harvest the entire cabbage plant—stems, head, and roots—enjoying the head as usual and storing the roots in a root cellar through winter.
 2. As soon as the ground has thawed in spring, plant the roots outdoors.

added to soups, salads, or a dish of your choice.

4. These replanted cabbages won't produce full heads, but they should go to seed by the end of summer, providing next year's round of cabbage seeds!

- **Note:** This can also be done indoors on a windowsill in mid-to late winter; keep roots damp and sprouts should form.

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PESTS/DISEASES

Some old folklore tells us: *Scatter elder leaves over your cabbage to keep the bugs away.*

Cabbage Pests and Diseases

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Aphids	Insect	Misshapen/yellow leaves; sticky “honeydew” (excrement); sooty, black mold	Grow companion plants ; knock off with water spray; apply insecticidal soap; put banana or orange peels around plants; wipe leaves with a 1 to 2 percent solution of dish soap (no additives) and water every 2 to 3 days for 2 weeks; add native plants to invite beneficial insects
Black rot	Fungus	Yellow, V-shape areas on leaf edges that brown and progress toward leaf center; leaves eventually collapse; stem cross sections re-	Destroy infected plants; choose resistant varieties; provide good drainage; remove plant debris; rotate crops

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
<u>Cabbage loopers</u>	Insect	Large, ragged holes in leaves from larval feeding; defoliation; stunted or bored heads; excrement	Handpick; add native plants to invite beneficial insects; spray larvae with insecticidal soap or Bt; use row covers; remove plant debris
<u>Cabbage root maggots</u>	Insect	Wilted/stunted plants; off-color leaves; larvae feeding on roots	Use collars around seedling stems; monitor adults with yellow sticky traps; use row covers; destroy crop residue; till soil in fall; rotate crops
<u>Cabbageworms</u>	Insect	Leaves have large, ragged holes or are skeletonized; heads bored; dark green excrement; yellowish eggs laid singly on leaf undersides	Handpick; use row covers; add native plants to invite beneficial insects; grow companion plants (especially thyme); spray <i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> (Bt)
Clubroot	Fungus	Wilted/stunted plants; yellow leaves; roots an-	Destroy infected plants; solarize soil; maintain soil

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Downy mildew	Fungus	Yellow, angular spots on upper leaf surfaces that turn brown; white/purple/gray cottony growth on leaf undersides only; distorted leaves; defoliation	Remove plant debris; choose resistant varieties; ensure good air circulation; avoid overhead watering
<u>Flea beetles</u>	Insect	Numerous tiny holes in leaves	Use row covers; mulch heavily; add native plants to invite beneficial insects
<u>Slugs/snails</u>	Mollusk	Irregular holes in leaves; slimy secretion on plants/soil; seedlings “disappear”	Handpick; avoid thick bark mulch; use copper plant collars; avoid overhead watering; lay boards on soil in evening, and in morning dispose of “hiding” pests in hot, soapy water; drown in deep container filled with 1/2 inch of beer, or sugar water and yeast, and sunk so that top edge is

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
			food-grade diatomaceous earth as barrier
Stinkbugs	Insect	Yellow/white blotches on leaves; eggs, often keg-shape, in clusters on leaf undersides	Destroy crop residue; handpick (bugs emit odor, wear gloves); destroy eggs; spray nymphs with insecticidal soap; use row covers; weed; till soil in fall
<u>Thrips</u>	Insect	Leaves, especially in folds near base, have white patches or silver streaks; brown leaf tips; blistering/bronzing on cabbage leaves; curling or scarring	Remove plant debris; choose resistant varieties; add native plants to invite beneficial insects; use row covers; use straw mulch; monitor adults with yellow or white sticky traps; use sprinklers or other overhead watering
<u>White mold</u>	Fungus	Pale gray, “water-soaked” areas on stems, leaves, and other plant	Destroy infected plants; ensure good air circulation; water in

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
		growth, later with black particles; bleached areas; crowns rot; plants wilt/collapse	crops on 5-year or longer cycle may help



Cabbageworm damage

WIT AND WISDOM

- Traditionally, cabbage seeds were planted on St. Patrick’s Day in northern zones. Old-time farmers believed that to make them grow well you needed to plant them while wearing your nightclothes!
- Plant near [beans](#) and [cucumbers](#), not near broccoli, cauliflower, strawberries, or tomatoes. Check out our chart of [plant companions](#) for an expanded list of friends and foes.

Cabbage: A familiar kitchen-garden vegetable about as large and wise as a man's head.

—Abrose Bierce (1842–c.1914)

RECIPES

**PEEL-A-POUND SOUP (DIET
CABBAGE SOUP)**

**PORK TENDERLOIN WITH APPLES
AND RED CABBAGE**

CORNEB BEEF AND CABBAGE

MOM'S CARAWAY COLESLAW

COOKING NOTES

If boiling cabbage, drop walnuts (shell on) into the water; they will absorb the cabbage's unpleasant odor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Stanley Davies (not verified)

4 months 1

Very detailed information on cabbage farming.

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Thank you Catherine, from Stanley Davies,
Kaduna - Nigeria.

REPLY

Stacie (not verified) 6 months 2 weeks ago

This is a very good cabbage primer. I've grown them, but am heading an elementary school garden group and needed a few extra points to make.

I love the 'plant on St. Patrick's in your night clothes'!

REPLY

Mathewos (not verified) 1 year 7 months ago

This is attractive & good idea growing and harvesting about cabbage I am following it to grow.

REPLY

Very informative

Thank you

REPLY

Lyndon wright (not verified) 2 years 2

months ago

Love that

REPLY

Ajah (not verified) 2 years 3 months ago

what is the price of it? 😊

REPLY

Chipo (not verified) 3 years 4 months ago

Very informative article

Is it possible to plant the crop during the rainy season? If so how do i aid the soil to avoid water clogging?

REPLY

Tsakani Ngoben (not verified) 3 years 7 months ago

I appreciate in all the growing tips and maintenance of cabbage

REPLY

The Editors 3 years 7 months ago

See this helpful article on [how to pre-serve cabbage](#). And here's our Almanac [recipe on making sauerkraut](#)!

REPLY

CAROL A ENGLE (not verified) 4 years 1 month ago

Hi,

I want to know if there is a device that will measure the hrs of sunlight on certain areas of my yard. I do have a lot of trees and several different planting areas I want to make sure I'm choosing the correct locations for certain vegetables. Since we can grow cabbages all year

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

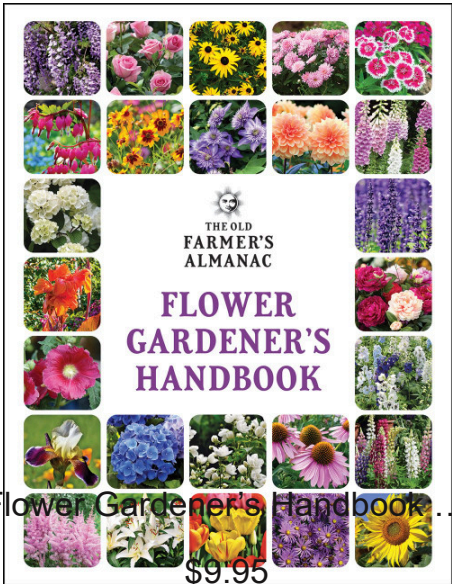
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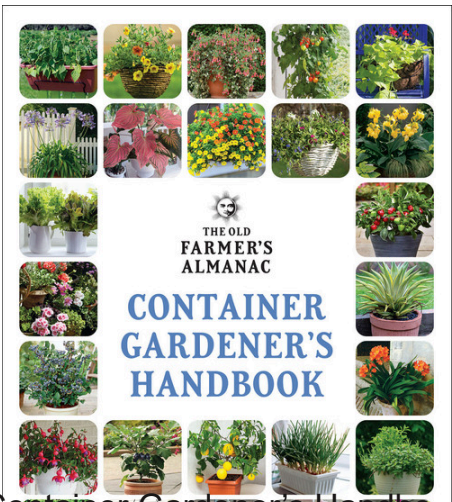
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