

GROWING GUIDE FOR BROCCOLI

Binomial Name:	Brassica oleracea
Varieties:	Romanesco Italia, Calabrese Green Sprouting, Early Purple Sprouting
Start:	Seeds or seedlings
Germination:	4 - 7 days, 7°C to 30°C
Seed Life (viability):	3 to 5 years
Soil:	Well drained and fertile
Sunlight:	Full sun
Sow Seeds:	15 cm apart
Transplant Seedlings:	30 to 45 cm apart
Ave. Days to Harvest:	55 to 60
Good Companions:	Beans, Celery, Chamomile, Dill, Mint, Nasturtium, Onion, Oregano, Potato, Rosemary, Sage
Bad Companions:	Lettuce, Strawberry, Tomato

Sowing & Planting:

Broccoli is a member of the cabbage family and is a biennial plant grown as an annual for its edible, immature flower heads. One of the most nutritious vegetables, it contains high levels of antioxidants. Romanesco types are especially handsome choices for edible landscaping. Choose varieties touted for their abundant side shoots to extend the harvest; once the central head is harvested, these side shoots will continue to produce small heads for weeks.

Requires good soil, timely planting and protection from pests. This cool-season crop grows best when daytime temperatures are in the range of 15°C to 20°C. Depending on your climate you can grow broccoli in both spring and autumn but avoid growing during summer as hot weather can cause premature bolting.

For spring crops, sow seeds indoors in seedling trays 5 to 7 weeks before the last average frost date and keep the soil warm (about 24°C) until germination. Then keep the plants at around 15°C. Provide direct sun so seedlings don't get leggy. When seedlings are 4 to 6 weeks old, transplant into garden 30 to 45 cm apart. Use the wider spacing's if you want to harvest large central heads. Closer spacing's will produce smaller central heads. If you harvest secondary heads you will get a greater total yield from the closer spacing's.

Protect transplants from hard frosts with newspapers, plastic cones, paper bags, or baskets and provide a windbreak to reduce transplant shock and moisture loss.

For autumn/winter crops you can also direct seed straight into the garden 85 to 100 days before the average first frost date (around mid-summer).

Broccoli prefers well-drained, fertile soil high in organic matter, pH 6.0 to 7.5. Can tolerate slightly alkaline soil. Needs plentiful, consistent moisture. Select a site with full sun and well-drained soil. Broccoli can also tolerate light shade but this will slow maturity. Prepare the garden bed by using a garden fork or tiller to loosen the soil to a depth of 30 to 40 cm, then mix in a 5 to 10 cm layer of compost.

Growing:

Consistent temperatures are key to getting good heads, some cultivars will form small "button" heads if the weather suddenly turns warm following a week or two stretch when high temperatures only reach the 5°C to 10°C range.

Apply a good layer of compost halfway through the season or use a low nitrogen fertilizer at planting (too much nitrogen fertilizer may cause hollow stems). Plants have shallow root systems so try and avoid even shallow cultivation. Mulch well to protect roots, reduce weed competition and conserve moisture.

Use floating row covers to help protect from early insect infestations. To help reduce disease, do not plant broccoli or other cole crops in the same location more than once every three or four years.

Harvesting:

Harvest for peak quality when the buds of the head are firm and tight. If buds start to separate and the yellow petals inside start to show, harvest immediately.

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