

GROWING GUIDE FOR CAULIFLOWER

Binomial Name:	Brassica oleracea
Varieties:	Purple Cape, Purple of Sicily, Rosalind, Snowball Self-Blanching
Start:	Seeds or seedlings
Germination:	4-7 days, 7°C to 30°C
Seed Life (viability):	5 years
Soil:	Well drained and fertile
Sunlight:	Full sun
Sow Seeds:	5 to 8 cm apart
Transplant Seedlings:	40 to 60 cm apart
Ave. Days to Harvest:	68 to 75
Good Companions:	Beans, Beets, Celery, Chamomile, Dill, Oregano, Yarrow
Bad Companions:	Peas, Potato, Strawberry, Tomato

Sowing & Planting:

The most finicky and difficult of the cole (cabbage family) crops to grow, cauliflower flourishes when temperatures are moderate. Heads will not develop properly in hot or dry weather so timing is crucial. Will tolerate cold as well as other cole crops but mature heads are not resistant to hard freezes.

Purple, orange and yellow-green coloured varieties make good addition to flower gardens. Cauliflowers are slow-growing, long-season vegetables belonging to the cabbage family.

In addition to tying heads to blanch white-headed varieties, cauliflower 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. 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.

For spring crops, sow seeds indoors in seedling trays 4 to 6 weeks before average last frost. Keep soil warm (about 24°C), until germination. Then keep plants around 15°C. Provide direct sun so plants don't get leggy. When plants are 4 to 6 weeks old, transplant into garden 40 to 60 cm apart in rows 60 to 90 cm apart. Wait until soil temperature is 10°C or above and danger of frost is past before transplanting. Direct seeding is more difficult than with other cole crops, especially in spring.

For autumn/winter crops, plant seed in late summer 1 to 2 cm deep, about 8 cm apart. Thin to final spacing's. Cauliflower 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. Cauliflower can also tolerate light shade but this will slow maturity. Light shade can be beneficial in warm weather. 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 good 5 to 10 cm layer of compost.

Growing:

Apply a good layer of compost again halfway through the season. Plants have shallow root systems though 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 cauliflowers or other cole crops in the same location more than once every three or four years.

When the curd flower head is 5 to 8 cm in diameter, pull three or four large leaves over the curd and fasten with a rubber band at the tips to shade and blanch the curd. Normal blanching time is 3 to 4 days, but may take much longer in the autumn. Self-blanching types do not require this type of curd covering process.

From tying to harvest may take less than a week in summer or as long as a month in autumn. Too much sun, heat or nitrogen fertilizer during this period can cause "ricey" heads where the curd separates into small, rice-like grains.

Plants started in midsummer for an autumn harvest will withstand light fall frosts and develop superior quality produce with a milder flavour than those that mature in hot weather. Light frosts will control insect pests allowing for fewer insect problems upon harvest.

Harvesting:

Cauliflower should be harvested while the curd is still firm. When it is over-ripe, it becomes grainy or "ricey." When pulling off the curd, don't pull off all of the leaves - leave a row of leaves around the curd to prolong storage quality.

For more heirloom & organic seed products please visit our website
www.organicseeds.co.za