

Broccoli (*Brassica oleracea*)



Part Shade



Important facts about Broccoli

Broccoli is a hardy, fairly quick-maturing crop which belongs to the Cabbage family. This vegetable is very sensitive to heat, especially heat combined with good growing conditions.

At first you might think it's growing mightily (which it is), but too suddenly you find that the heat has forced it to flower—which means it's too late for good eating.

Pick broccoli while heads are tight. When heads start to spread, the skin on the stems will be thick and require peeling off. Pick off stems that you need from the base, leaving the less mature ones farther up the stem to develop.

Broccoli culture

Broccoli prefers coolness and moisture. In the regions of the country where summer arrives early, it will be most successful if planted as a fall crop. However, certain gardeners contend that it thrives best as a two-season crop for both spring and fall.

Early Season Planting

The seeds are sown in late winter, one-half inch deep in flats and placed in a warm, sunny window or greenhouse. Seedlings can be set out early in spring, as soon as the garden soil can be worked. Later, when most danger of severe frost has passed, more seeds are sown directly in the garden. When stalks are three or four inches tall, thin the plants or transplant them so that they stand 18 to 24 inches apart in the row. The transplanted broccoli can be harvested throughout the spring and early summer.

Late Season Planting

Broccoli that is direct-seeded into the garden in late May will mature during the cool, early autumn months. Transplanting is not necessary when broccoli is planted in this way. The important thing is to care for them throughout the summer as you would any other crop. Thus, with a little planning, you can enjoy fresh-picked garden broccoli throughout the growing season.

The moisture and fertilizer requirements of Broccoli

Broccoli is not a greedy feeder. It will do best in a moderately rich soil, provided that soil is well drained and easy to work. Broccoli thrives in soils ranging from sand and clay to peat. It is a thirsty vegetable that requires plenty of moisture.

Harvesting Broccoli

The plant form of broccoli consists of a thick main stalk, at the end of which develops a central cluster of tiny, dark green flower buds. Stem, buds and leaves are edible, but the leaves are less tender than the stem and buds and are usually discarded into the compost heap.

Some watchfulness is necessary to see that the greenish heads are harvested well before the

flower buds expand and dry out. After the main head has been cut the side shoots will continue to form smaller heads and provide a steady and heavy harvest over a considerable period. All heads should be cut off in such a manner that a fairly long stub of stem remains on the plant.

After the central head of broccoli has been cut for food, a number of small lateral roots will develop in the axils of the remaining leaves. These shoots also produce flower buds which are edible. The welcome harvest of this important, easy-to-grow vegetable will last for several weeks. From four to six cuttings of stems and buds may be expected from every stalk.

Varieties of Broccoli

Green Comet Hybrid is favorite choice of gardeners due to its short growing season of 40 days. The two branching varieties, Spartan Early and De Cicco, both have a maturation of 60 days. Calabrese is prolific and hardy.