

How to grow Brussels sprout

Brussels Sprout

Family: Brassicaceae (Mustard)
 Season: Cool
 Ease of growing: Moderate
 Nutrient needs: High
 Water needs: Moderate
 Common propagation: Transplant

Seed facts

Germination temperature: 45°F to 85°F
 Germination time: 4 to 20 days
 Viability: 3 to 10 years

Transplants

Weeks to grow transplants: 4 to 6
 Start: April to May
 Plant out: mid-May to mid-June

Planning facts

Typical spacing: 18" x 30"
 Square foot per plant: 2
 Time to harvest: 90 to 110 days from transplants

General

The brussels sprout plant is distinctive in that it produces little green or red mini-cabbages in the leaf axils of the stem. This plant, like kohlrabi, is among very few new vegetables – it was unknown until about 400 or 500 years ago. It developed in the vicinity of Brussels, Belgium, where it gets its name.

Variety selection

Relatively few varieties are available from most seed catalogs. Use faster maturing varieties

such as Oliver (90 days from transplanting) if you are late getting plants going.

Preparation and planting

The best tasting brussels sprouts are grown in fertile soil, with plenty of irrigation, and harvested after fall frosts. Brussels sprouts in Michigan are usually grown from transplants set out in mid-summer. They are hardy, and can often be harvested well into December. As with its close relative – broccoli – cold fall temperatures result in a milder, sweeter flavor. This plant requires relatively high levels of potassium, so it's advisable to run a soil test.

Care

See the broccoli tip sheet. It is recommended that the terminal bud be pinched in early September so that no more sprouts form, allowing existing sprouts to develop. Hot weather will give strong flavored, loose sprouts.

Major pests

Insects: Aphids, flea-beetles, cabbage maggots, imported cabbage worm, cabbage loopers, diamondback moth.

Diseases: Black rot, downy mildew, alternaria.

Harvest and storage

As the season progresses, the sprouts begin to form on the lower portion of the plant first. As the leaves begin to turn a little yellow, break them off, leaving about a 2-inch stalk. This will give the sprouts more room to develop. Harvest brussels sprouts when the heads are firm and 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Each plant yields between 60 and 100 sprouts. The leaves are also edible with a kale-like flavor, and can be harvested after maturation.

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