

## How to grow cabbage

### Cabbage

Family: Brassicaceae (Mustard)  
 Season: Cool  
 Ease of growing: Fairly easy  
 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: March to May  
 Plant out: April (early crop) to early-July (late crop).

### Planning facts

Typical spacing: 12" x 24"; 15" x 36"  
 Square foot per plant: 1 to 2  
 Time to harvest: 60 to 95 days from transplant

### Variety selection

Cabbage may be divided into two general groups: loose-heading and hard-heading. They vary in color from dark green and red to white. Most Michigan gardeners grow or purchase transplants. They are usually advertised as early, midseason or late varieties. Some varieties are better for fresh consumption and others are more suited to long-term storage. Most have smooth leaves except for Savoy types—these have crinkly leaves and contain higher amounts of iron. Ornamental cabbages used in flower beds and other areas of the landscape have

loose heads or ruffled leaves that add an interesting touch to the annual garden. They are edible too.

### Preparation and planting

Cabbage grows well under Michigan's cool conditions. It withstands temperatures down to 20°F. The plant thrives in most soils as long as adequate moisture is available. Follow soil test recommendations when adding nutrients.

### Care

Shallow cultivation is necessary to prevent root damage. Cabbage is shallow rooted and usually requires irrigation, but is more drought tolerant than broccoli. It's important to apply moisture evenly late in the season, otherwise developing heads may split. Avoid late evening overhead watering, as this tends to encourage diseases such as black rot and downy mildew. Adding N fertilizer six to eight weeks after transplanting is common for this heavy feeder, especially if a lot of rain has fallen.

### Major pests

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

**Diseases:** Black rot, downy mildew, alternaria.

### Harvesting and storage

Harvest cabbage when the head is firm and has reached an acceptable size. Cabbages not harvested when ready are subject to head splitting. You can slow this process by twisting the heads or slicing the roots. For the best flavor, eat soon after picking. However, under proper conditions (32°F; 95 percent humidity) cabbage can be stored for up to six months with little loss in quality. Do not store cabbage with ethylene generators such as apples.

[www.migarden.msu.edu](http://www.migarden.msu.edu)

Developed by James Manning, Undergraduate Research Assistant, and Daniel Brainard, Vegetable Extension Specialist; MSU Department of Horticulture; Gary Heilig, MSU Extension educator.

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Interim Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.