



## *Broccoli, Cauliflower & Brussels Sprouts*

*Three things Broccoli, Cauliflower & Brussels Sprouts have in common are:*

All three should be started with small plants but can be put out 2-3 weeks before the last frost date.

All three are cold weather crops that like our cool nights.

All three have more in common with or in the case of Broccoli & Cauliflower actually are flowers than vegetables.

**Broccoli** is a flower head that we eat. The florets we buy at the grocery store are only the very top ones a plant can produce. Homegrown plants will produce a hefty top floret plus numerous side shoots that can be harvested continually over the growing season.

Either start broccoli seeds inside 6-7 weeks before our average last frost date or purchase started plants in April to plant in the garden. Space plants about 18" apart to allow them to grow into large, producing plants. Set plants a few inches deeper than they are in their containers. Because cutworms can bother broccoli, we often plant them surrounded by a paper cup with the bottom cut off. This simple measure works well to deter these pests. Pay attention to the weather forecast and if a hard freeze (below 25 degrees) is called for, cover the plants lightly with an old sheet or row cover.

Like all garden vegetables, broccoli likes soil rich in organic matter and with light texture. Top dress broccoli plants a couple of times over the season with bone meal or fish fertilizers to encourage flowering. Be sure to keep the plants evenly moist and increase watering when the hot days of summer appear.

Harvest the central, top cluster first to encourage the side shoots to develop. If the weather cooperates and the weather does not get too hot, these side florets will produce for much of the summer. If you don't pick the florets they will go to 'seed', yellow flower petals will appear and the broccoli will have a bitter taste.

*Broccoli Tip: You can start a new crop from seed in the middle of July for a late season crop. Plant the seeds directly in the ground or start new plants in packs to put out in the middle of August.*

**Brussels Sprouts** are one of the crops we harvest the latest with some gardeners actually plucking them directly from the garden for the Thanksgiving table. Some cold and frost improves the flavor of Brussels Sprouts although they will not tolerate hard freezes without a mulch of straw or pine boughs.

If you want to start seeds inside, do so by the middle of March to have plants to set out in late April. If you buy plants be sure to harden them off by taking them in and outside for a few days. Set plants in hills so you can continue to mound up soil to support the floppy plants. Staking is also a good idea when the stalks become loaded with sprouts.

Good rich soil, lots of sun and plenty of water make Brussels Sprouts happy, producing plants that reward you with a harvest of fresh vegetables long after most garden vegetables are done for the season. You can

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harvest fresh sprouts once they are the size of a large marble. Simply twist them off and enjoy their fresh taste. Later when you want to harvest the whole crop, cut the stalk off at the base and twist the sprouts off in the warmth of your kitchen.

*Brussels Sprouts Tip: In late fall you can pull up the entire plant, roots and all, and store it in a cool place for a few weeks, picking off a few at a time for use. Hang them by the roots from the beams in a cool garage.*

**Cauliflower** is a big, lumpy white flower. Can you imagine having a bouquet of those delivered with a ribbon in a vase! Cauliflower plants can take a little bit of frost in spring and again in fall but they don't like hard frosts or freezes. You can start seeds inside 4-6 weeks before our average last frost. Set plants out when they are about 6" tall, a few weeks before the end of May. Be sure to harden plants off for at least a week.

Select a sunny, well drained site in rich garden soil. Space plants about 18" apart. Each plant will produce one head. When the head is about egg sized, pull the leaves over it to cover it and secure them loosely with a rubber band. Continue to adjust this covering all through the growing season to bleach the heads white. Even 'self-bleaching' varieties taste better if they are protected this way. Unbleached heads will be green and while still edible, they are not as tasty as white ones. Don't use overhead watering for Cauliflower, it can rot the heads. Water the soil around the plants instead. You may even need to uncover heads briefly after heavy rains to allow it to dry.

Check the heads from time to time as fall approaches. When they are about 6" across, you can cut them off at the bottom of the head or pull the whole plant to store in a cool, dry place. While Cauliflower needs a bit of babying in the garden, it rewards you with taste filled produce that may appeal to even your most picky eater. It is excellent roasted. Try roasting a whole head by rubbing it with olive oil and garlic and baking it at 350 degrees for about 1 hour.

*Cauliflower Tip: Cauliflower is a good choice for peat pots that dissolve after you plant them. They don't like root disturbance so being able to simply plant the whole pot works great!*