



Broccoli Planting Guide

About Broccoli

Your parents were spot on when they told you to eat your broccoli, a true powerhouse of nutrients! Heart health, cholesterol reduction, eye health, cancer reduction—the list of the benefits of broccoli goes on and on. Originally from Italy where it has been growing since the 6th century BC, broccoli seeds were introduced to the U.S. by Thomas Jefferson who planted them at Monticello as early as 1767. We have been growing this superfood ever since, with California satisfying 90% of our country's needs.

When to Plant

Broccoli can be planted in both the spring and fall. The seeds can germinate with temperatures as low as 40°F. If you live in a warmer climate, broccoli does best with a fall or winter planting.

For spring plantings, start seeds indoors in early to mid-April. For a fall crop, start seeds indoors or out in early to late July.

Where to Plant

Broccoli needs full sun and moist soil. Slightly acidic soil is preferred. For soil testing, contact your local agricultural extension office.

Plant broccoli where you have not grown related crops—cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards, kale, mustard, turnip, or rutabaga—for the past four years.

How to Plant

Direct sow outdoors: Plant the seeds ½ inch deep in fertile soil. If planting in rows, plant 12 to 24 inches apart with rows 36 inches apart. Keep your broccoli plants watered, but take care to not get the developing broccoli heads wet while watering. To produce sweet, flavorful, firm, non-bitter heads, the plants must not experience water stress. If the planting does not receive one inch of rain each week, soak the soil thoroughly at least once a week. If the plants do not receive consistent rainfall or irrigation, they may form small, off-flavored heads.

Starting seeds indoors: For spring planting, sow seeds indoors two to three weeks before the last frost. Sow two to three seeds per pot, pushing seeds down about ½ inch deep, and keep soil consistently moist. If the top inch of soil is dry, it is time to water. Broccoli is a cold-season crop, needing temperatures in the 55 to 75°F range, as well as six to eight hours of sunlight per day. This is usually not an issue indoors. Expect to see your broccoli seeds germinate in four to seven days. For fall planting: sow seeds 85 to 100 days before the average fall frost, during mid- to late-summer. Harden off seedlings prior to planting them in your outside garden.

How to Harvest Broccoli

Harvest your broccoli when you see that the buds of the head are firm and before flower buds have opened. Cut the stalk of the main head at a slant, and smaller side shoots will grow up from where you've cut. Broccoli will continue to grow after the first light frosts in the fall. If you live in a warmer climate, broccoli does best with a fall planting. If you fear that your soil will be too hot, a layer of mulch will help ensure cooler soil temperatures. Take care to harvest your broccoli before the yellow flower petals start to show—those parts have a mealy texture.

The tender, bright green flower stalks and undeveloped flowers can be eaten raw as part of a vegetable platter or chopped and mixed into a salad or slaw. Some prefer broccoli cooked in a soup or in a savory sauté, as well as stir-fried or steamed as a side dish.

The leaves of broccoli plants are edible. Use them as you would kale or collards. Some varieties have purple coloring when raw. This coloring usually fades, leaving a bright green hue after cooking.