

How to grow: BROCCOLI

"A super healthy food, packed full of nutrition, broccoli is a staple crop on many veg patches and allotments. It is easy to grow from seed and newbie gardeners can produce good crops without the need of specialist knowledge"

Essential Kit:

- Chicken Manure Pellets
- High Nitrogen Fertiliser
- Full Size Seed Tray & Inserts
- Cabbage Collars
- Bird Netting

CHOOSE YOUR SEED TYPE

As with most veg broccoli comes in many varieties, so choose the one that's right for you. You can get fast growing ones, ones with large heads, ones with purple heads and lots more.

I've grown a few varieties over the years but my favourites are Purple Sprouting Broccoli 'Red Fire F1'. This gives a tender smaller stem of broccoli with that distinctive purple colour. 'Di Cicco' is my other favourite, providing a full head of green that would be at home on any dining table.

WHEN & HOW TO SOW

Depending on your location in the UK will guide you as to when to sow the seeds. As a general rule of thumb sow them 4-6 weeks before your last frost date and keep them undercover.

If you are sowing direct then sow them once the soil has warmed up, as they are quite hardy a late frost shouldn't be a problem.

Some gardeners will soak the seeds for anywhere up to 24hrs before sowing but it isn't essential if you have good seed.

Use a good quality compost, with some perlite added to help drainage, and fill a 24 cell seed tray. Use your finger or dibber to make a shallow hole to take one or two seed per cell.

Finish off with a light covering of compost and tap down to firm it up before watering. Ideally cover with a propagator lid to ensure the compost doesn't dry out during germination. Within 7-10 days you will see your first seedlings emerge and it's time to remove the lid and let air circulate around the seedlings.

PLANTING OUT

You can sow broccoli seed direct outside from around April onwards. Broccoli is frost hardy so young plants can be planted out a couple of weeks before the last frosts. Ensure that you have hardened them off before planting outside, and that the ground is soft and not frozen. This crop loves to grow in a sunny position and will thrive best in free draining soil.

When sowing direct or planting out leave a gap of 20cm - 30cm between each plant and sow to a depth of around 2cm before covering over. Make sure you leave a gap of 45cm between each row to ensure maximum crop yield.

Prepare the bed before planting using a potassium rich fertiliser such as Elixir Gardens EX4. This will help build stronger roots and disease resistance.

You should thin the seedlings if you have planted multiple seeds per cell to leave the strongest plant. If the seedlings are very close to each other then avoid disturbing the strongest seedlings by snipping the weaker ones at the base.

If you sow directly, or plant young seedlings then cover over with frost fleece to protect from cabbage root fly. This pest, which can decimate a crop, is active between April and early June when young plants are most susceptible.

HARVESTING

From late summer into autumn your broccoli will start to produce those tasty and densely packed flower buds.

Harvest the central spear first leaving behind the surrounding side shoots. These shoots will,

over the next 6 weeks, will keep on producing spears for regular picking.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Many new gardeners experience long and leggy seedlings. This is caused by a lack of light, which can be resolved by using a grow light as soon as the first seedlings appear.

Pay attention to the expiry dates on seed packets. The older the seed gets the more scope there is for poor germination levels.

Poor germination can also be caused by having the compost either too dry or too wet.

Need to know:



SOW:
March to June



PLANT:
April onwards



HARVEST:
12-24 weeks from germination



SPACING:
20cm - 30cm



LOCATION:
Plant in full sun