

Harvest of the Month Broccoli





Social Sciences

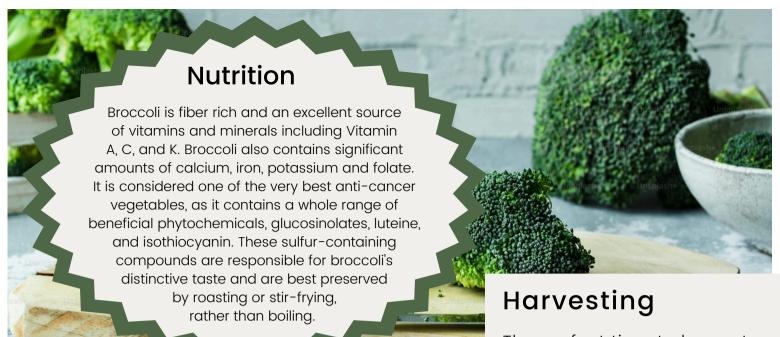
Like all the other Brassicas, broccoli was developed from wild cabbage. It is a result from breeding landrace Brassica crops in the Northern Mediterranean starting around the sixth Century. With origins in primitive cultivars grown in the Roman Empire, it was most likely improved in the Southern Italian Peninsula or in Sicily. Broccoli spread to Northern Europe by the 18th Century, and was then brought to North America in the 19th century by Italian immigrants. Today, China and India grow more broccoli than all other countries combined; the United States is a distant third. 95% of the broccoli grown in the United States is grown in California.

Brócoli means broccoli in Spanish.



broccoli is Brassica
oleracea. It is a member of
the Brassica family of
plants, which contains many
food crops including
cauliflower, cabbage,
turnips, and kale. The
Brassica family is unique in
that we eat all the different
parts of the plant; roots,
stems, leaves, and flowers!
What part of the plant do
you think is a head of
broccoli? The flower buds!





Growing Tips

Growing large heads of broccoli is all about getting the timing right. Broccoli needs to grow fast for best quality. To do this it needs a rich, moist, well-drained soil with lots of organic matter and nutrients. Broccoli is not a plant that enjoys hot weather. Spring plantings need to be done as soon as the soil is dry enough to work as our Springs are often not long enough to grow big heads of broccoli. In Sonoma County we can plant broccoli starting in mid-August through October for late Autumn and Winter harvests.

Care & Maintenance

Broccoli is not a low-maintenance crop. The plants need looking after carefully. Make sure they are planted in fertile soil and that the soil remains moist throughout the lifecycle, or they can bolt prematurely. Broccoli plants can get quite large so be sure to give them plenty of space. The more space they have, the bigger the plants will get (if the soil has sufficient fertility, and the bigger the heads will be. Plan on at least 16" between plants.

The perfect time to harvest broccoli is when the individual flower buds are visible and somewhat swollen. The head should have a nice domed appearance. You can also cut the head before this time, and it is still edible after this stage, once the flower buds begin to open. Many varieties will produce side shoots once the main head is cut. Check your plants every few days and continue to harvest these side shoots, which will look like individual florets.

Fun Fact

Rapini, sometimes called "broccoli rabe", is a distinct species from broccoli, forming similar but smaller heads, and is actually a type of turnip (Brassica rapa).