



Design for Everyday Living

Growing Brussels Sprouts

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BRUSSELS sprouts is a cool season vegetable that is considered a delicacy by many people. It is a crop that is exacting in both its soil and climatic requirements. Because of its exacting habits, particularly the climatic requirements, it is only practical to grow brussels sprouts as a fall crop in most parts of West Virginia.

The best quality sprouts are produced in the fall with sunny days and light frosts at night. Hot weather results in soft open sprouts which are undesirable.

VARIETY

Jade Cross is a widely adapted hybrid variety developed for shipping, processing, and home garden use. The plants are vigorous, uniform in size and appearance, with dark green leaves and long, narrow petioles, and produce heavy yields of closely spaced, very firm, highly uniform sprouts, averaging about 1½ inches in diameter.

SOIL AND FERTILIZATION

Brussels sprouts is a crop that should have uninterrupted growth. Any delay in growth will cause disappointing yield and quality of sprouts. A soil high in organic matter so that it will hold a lot of moisture is necessary to keep the plants growing vigorously. Irrigation is helpful. If possible, plow under a heavy application of manure and by all means use a good cover crop.

Brussels sprouts demand a sweet soil so be sure the pH is about 6.5. Even though the soil is fertile it must receive a good application of a commercial fertilizer such as 5-10-10. Broadcast at least 2000 pounds per acre or 5 pounds for each 100 square feet and work into the soil about one week before the plants are set. This fertilizer should contain some of the minor elements, particularly boron and magnesium. If it does not it would be wise to purchase a small amount of a special minor element mixture and add to the fertilizer according to the directions on the container.

PLANTS

Plants should be about six weeks old when set in the field. You may have to grow your own. The plants are grown the same as cabbage plants. Sow the seed six weeks before the plants are to be set in the field. This will be about June 4 for most of the state.

SETTING PLANTS

Set the plants 24 inches apart in the row and have the rows 30 inches apart. Set the plants



about July 10-15. Water the plants when transplanting to prevent wilting. Severe shock to plants at transplanting time often causes poor plant development. Watering the plants with a starter solution is helpful. Make a starter solution by adding one cup of 5-10-10 fertilizer to 12 quarts of water. Stir and then let set for a few hours. Use one cup of this solution around the roots when a plant is set.

NITRATING

For best development brussels sprouts must have a large amount of available nitrogen. This is best supplied by making at least three side-dressings with nitrate of soda or other nitrate fertilizer. Make the first application after the plants have been in the field about three weeks and then two more applications two weeks apart. Each application should be one tablespoon per plant, one pound for 150 feet of row, or 200 pounds per acre. Make the application on top of the ground out about 3 inches from the plant. A circle around each plant is a good method if only a few plants are grown in the home garden.

If a nitrogen fertilizer is not available, work a quart of fresh chicken manure into the soil around each plant 3 weeks after setting out the plants.

CABBAGE ROOT MAGGOT

This small fly deposits eggs at the base of the plant and in cracks in the soil nearby. The eggs hatch in about one week and the maggots feed on the stem and roots.

FOLIAGE FEEDING INSECTS
(Cabbage looper, imported cabbage worm, aphids, and Harlequin bug)

Ordinarily worms and aphids are most troublesome, with the Harlequin bug of most importance in the southern part of the state. Make twice-weekly examinations of the plants for the first appearance of insects. Control measures do not need to begin until insects or insect eggs are found on the plants. Be certain to examine the undersides of the lower leaves.

CLUBROOT

Clubroot is a disease which causes overgrowths or swellings of the underground stem and roots of cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, etc. Once the organism responsible for this disease is introduced into a field or garden, it will remain troublesome for 3 to 7 years even though no cruciferous crops are grown during the period. The swellings or "clubs" on the roots interfere with the ability of the plant to take up food from the soil and as a result such plants never produce a crop.

Control:

- (1) Use only plants whose roots show no suspicious swellings.
- (2) Rotate crops so that closely related crops do not follow each other on the same soil each year.

Contact your local county Extension office for current pest control recommendations.

John Jett March 1996

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CULTIVATION

Cultivate only to control weeds and then be sure that the cultivation is very shallow.

HARVESTING

Harvesting usually begins about three months after setting the plants. Early sprouts should be picked over several times, the lowest on the plant being taken each time, otherwise those will open out and become yellow. The first picking should not be delayed after the lower leaves begin to turn yellow as the sprouts get tough and lose their delicate flavor. In picking, the leaf below the sprout is broken off and the sprout removed by breaking away from the stalk. As the lower leaves and sprouts are removed, the plant continues to push out new leaves at the top and in the axil of each leaf, a bud or sprout is formed. Commercial growers of Brussels sprouts usually pack the sprouts in quart berry boxes for shipment.

Sprouts keep well in storage at 32° F and high humidity (95 to 98%) for six to eight weeks. For home use the whole plant may be stored in a cool cellar and the sprouts removed as needed. Bring the plants indoors just before severe freezing occurs.