



Design for Everyday Living

growing cauliflower



Cauliflower is a cool season vegetable that is considered a delicacy by many persons. It is a crop that is exacting in both its soil and climatic requirements. For this reason, it is grown commercially only in the higher altitude areas. It can be grown successfully, however, in home gardens over the entire state if it is planted so that it will mature in the early summer or in the fall.

VARIETY

Snowball Imperial, which matures in 58 days, is a good variety. It harvests over a short period and cuts out a high percentage of heads. Snowball E and Snowball are also good varieties for West Virginia conditions.

SOIL AND FERTILIZATION

Cauliflower is a crop that should have an uninterrupted growth. Any delay in growth will encourage the plants to prematurely form a small head that is of no value. In order to avoid this, the soil should be high in organic matter so that it will hold a lot of moisture. It must also be very fertile. Commercial plantings should follow a good clover sod. In the home garden the area should be well manured.

Cauliflower demands 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 1 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 your fertilizer according to directions on the container.

PLANTS

Cauliflower plants should be about 6 weeks old when set in the field, figuring 3-4 plants per person per year. You may have to grow your own. Cauliflower plants are grown the same as cabbage plants. Sow the seed 6 weeks before the plants are to be set in the field. This will be about March 1 for most of the state.

SETTING PLANTS

Set the plants 18 inches apart in the row and have the rows 30 inches apart. The plants should be set in the spring about 10 days after it is safe to set the earliest cabbage. The plants should be watered when transplanted to prevent wilting. Severe shock to plants at transplanting time often causes poor head 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 out.

NITRATING

For best development cauliflower must have a large amount of available nitrogen. This is best supplied by making at least three side-dressings with nitrate of soda. Make the first application after the plants have been in the field about 3 weeks and then two more applications 2 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 cauliflower 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 more importance in the southern part of the state. Make twice-weekly examinations of the cauliflower plants for the first appearance of insects. Dusting or spraying does 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. Contact your local county Extension office for current pest control recommendations.

CULTIVATION

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

TYING THE HEADS

In order to be good, cauliflower must be kept snowy white. This is done by tying the leaves together over the heads. This tying should be done when the heads are slightly smaller than a door knob. It must always be done, however, before any sunlight gets to the heads. The heads should be examined from time to time to see when they are ready to cut. If they are let go too long, the heads get loose and ricey, and lose much of their tenderness. It will usually be about one week from the time they are tied until they are ready to use.

HOW TO COOK

Cauliflower can be delicious, or it can be strong, mushy, and drab-beige. It depends on how you cook it. Cauliflower is best cooked barely tender, and snowy white. Remove green stalks. Wash and soak, head down, in cold salted water (4 teaspoons of salt to a gallon of water) for 30 minutes. Leave the head whole, or break into flowerlets. Cook covered in a little boiled salted water until tender. For a milder flavor cook uncovered in water to cover. A whole head takes 20-30 minutes. Season, add butter or cream sauce or brown buttered crumbs.

HOW TO FREEZE

Select white, compact heads. Break flowerlets into pieces about 1 inch across. Wash, scald 3 minutes in boiling water, chill, drain, and freeze immediately.

John Jett March 1996

The use of names of products or manufacturers in this publication does not constitute endorsement. Names are used only to provide knowledge for potential users. A number of similar and satisfactory products are available under a wide variety of trade names.

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, West Virginia University and the United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperating. Robert Maxwell, Interim Director, Morgantown, West Virginia. Published in Furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.