

Collards



Collard (also known as tree-cabbage or nonheading cabbage), is a cool-season vegetable green that is rich in vitamins and minerals. It grows better in warm weather and can tolerate more cold weather in the late fall than any other member of the cabbage family. Although collard is a popular substitute for cabbage in the Deep South, it can also be grown in northern areas because it is frost tolerant. Hybrid varieties recently have been introduced, bringing hybrid uniformity and vigor to collards.



Recommended Varieties

Champion (60 days to harvest; dark green; long-standing, compact plant; good cold tolerance)

Georgia LS (75 days; wavy leaves; slow to bolt)

Vates (75 days; low growing plant with smooth leaves)

Flash (73 days; hybrid; early; long, dark green leaves; slow to bolt)

When to Plant

Plant in early spring for summer harvest and again in midsummer for fall and early winter harvest.

Spacing & Depth

Sow the seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep. Thin the seedlings to 6 inches apart, allow them to grow until they begin to touch, then harvest whole plants to give 18 inches between plants. This allows enough space for plants to mature. Thinned plants may be eaten. Allow at least 3 feet between rows because plants become large.

Care

If you maintain ample soil moisture during hot periods in the summer and control insect and disease pests, collards produce an abundant harvest.

Harvesting

All green parts of the plant are edible and may be harvested at any time during the growing season. Plants grown 6 inches apart can be cut at ground level when they reach 6 to 10 inches in height. Plants left at wider spacing should be harvested by picking the larger leaves when the plants are 10 to 12 inches tall. This harvesting method allows the younger leaves to continually develop for later use.

Some gardeners prefer the young, tender leaves and cut the inner rosette of young growth. This "loose head" may be blanched by tying the outer leaves together to keep out the sun. As with other cole crops, frost improves the flavor in the fall.

Common Problems

Aphids — Watch for buildup of colonies of aphids on the undersides of the leaves.

For more information on aphids, [see our feature in the Bug Review](#).

Cabbage worms - Three species of cabbage worms (imported cabbage worms, cabbage loopers and diamond back moth worms) commonly attack the leaves and heads of cabbage and related cole crops. Imported cabbage worms are velvety green caterpillars. The moth is white and commonly is seen during the day hovering over plants in the garden. Cabbage loopers ("measuring worms") are smooth, light green caterpillars. The cabbage looper crawls by doubling up (to form a loop) and then moving the front of its body forward. The moth is brown and is most active at night. Diamondback worms are small, pale, green

caterpillars that are pointed on both ends. The moth is gray, with diamond-shaped markings when the wings are closed. The damage caused by diamondback larvae looks like shot holes in the leaf.

The larval or worm stages of these insects cause damage by eating holes in the leaves and cabbage head. The adult moths or butterflies lay their eggs on the leaves but otherwise do not damage the plants. The worms are not easy to see because they are fairly small and blend with the cabbage leaves. Cabbage worms are quite destructive and can ruin the crop if not controlled. They are even worse in fall plantings than in spring gardens because the population has had several months to increase. About the time of the first frost in the fall, moth and caterpillar numbers finally begin to decline drastically.

For more information on cabbage worms, [see our feature in the Bug Review](#).

Selection & Storage

Collards, also known as collard greens, are a member of the cabbage family. Collard greens have always enjoyed grand popularity in the southern states and lately it's popularity has grown throughout the nation. Collards grow from a main stalk with leaves that grow outward on inedible stems. The smooth, green firm leaves should be picked from the bottom of the stalk, as the stalk will continue to produce greens well into late fall. Pick clusters of lower leaves before they are full-sized, tough and woody.

Collards store better than most greens. Wrap unwashed leaves in moist paper towels and place in sealed plastic bag. They will stay fresh for 4-5 days in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. When ready to use wash thoroughly. Greens tend to have dirt and grit clinging to the leaves. Swish through several changes of cold water.

Nutritional Value & Health Benefits

Collards are fibrous, tough, mild-flavored greens that require long cooking. Hiding under the green chlorophyll pigment is an excellent source of beta carotene and some vitamin C and calcium. The darker the leaf the more beta carotene provided. Like broccoli and cabbage, the antioxidants and phytochemicals in collards may help to reduce the risk of some forms of cancer and heart disease. Collards contain very small amounts of fat and sodium.

Nutrition Facts (1/2 cup cooked collard greens)

Calories **56**
Protein **1 gram**
Dietary fiber **2.9 grams**
Carbohydrates **2.5 mg**
Dietary fiber **0.4 mg**
Calcium **74 mg**
Vitamin A **2,109 IU**
Vitamin C **9 mg**

Preparation & Serving

Wash collard greens in several changes of cool water to remove all dirt and grit. Remove the tough stems and central vein as well. Collard greens are tough and depending on the maturity of the leaves, may require 20 minutes to one hour of cooking time. The green leaves turn dark green during this long cooking process, and the cooking water will be greatly reduced.

Unfortunately, nutrients are leached out into the cooking liquid that many people pour down the drain. This cooking liquid or "pot likker," as it is called in Southern states, is full on valuable nutrients. Save it to add to soups or soak it up with a piece of hot cornbread.

Home Preservation

Collards are best eaten fresh. Come winter, if you have large quantities left in your garden, freezing is the best way to preserve them. Like all vegetables, collards must be blanched before freezing. If not, the leaves

will become tough and flavorless upon thawing and cooking. The blanching time for collard greens is 3-4 minutes per pound.

1. In a blanching pot or large pot with a tight fitting lid, bring 5 quarts of water to a rolling boil.
2. Meanwhile, wash collards, trim stem ends and cut into 1-inch pieces or leave whole.
3. Blanch no more than one pound at a time. Add collards to boiling water and immediately cover with a tight fitting lid.
4. Start timing immediately and blanch for 3-4 minutes.
5. Prepare an ice water bath in a large 5-quart container or the sink.
6. Remove collards from water with a slotted spoon or blanching basket.
7. Emerge in the ice water bath for five minutes or until cooled. If you do not have ice, use several changes of cold water or running cold water. Remove and drain.
8. Pack cold collards in zip-closure freezer bags or freezer containers. Squeeze out as much air as possible before sealing bags.
9. Label and date each container or bag. Immediately place in the freezer, allowing an inch of space around each container until it is frozen. Freeze for up to one year at 0 degrees F. or below.
10. Blanching water can be used over and over again. Add more water if necessary. Remember to always bring water back to a rolling boil before blanching more vegetables.

Recipes

The bitter flavor of cooked collards is enhanced when served with vinegar. Flavored vinegar such as chili vinegar or the vinegar from pickled peppers is especially good. Also use onions, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, and crushed red pepper to season collards.

Collard Greens with Smoked Turkey

Traditionally, collards and other types of greens, are cooked with bacon fat or ham hocks, which adds too much fat and salt to the greens. To retain desired flavor with less fat and salt, try this variation on an old southern recipe.

- 1 smoked turkey drumstick (about 1 1/4 lb.)
- 2 quarts water
- 2 lbs. fresh, young collard greens
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 hot chili peppers, seeded and chopped
- 2 cups chicken stock, canned or homemade

Heat water to a boil and add turkey. Simmer for 1-1/2 hours, or until turkey is almost tender. Drain and reserve cooking liquid. While turkey is cooking, pick through collards, removing yellow leaves, thick stems and large central veins from leaves. Fresh greens can be very dirty. Wash greens in several changes of cold water. Run the sink full of water, add the greens and wash the greens by swishing them through the water one handful at a time. Make sure all of the grit and dirt are removed from the greens before cooking. The final rinse should leave no grit in the bottom of the sink. Stack the wet greens and roll into a scroll. Slice crosswise into thin strips, or chop. Bring chicken stock to a boil. Add greens, garlic, onion, peppers, and turkey. Reduce heat to simmer and cook 20 minutes. Stir greens from the bottom as they cook down. Continue cooking until greens are tender. Depending on maturity of collards, cook 30 to 40 minutes.