



Kale has been in the spotlight recently due to the very qualities that gardeners have always praised—its impressive nutrient value and its delicious earthy flavor. Every kale-lover has his or her favorite variety. Some prefer the nutty taste of Toscano (also known as Dinosaur or Lacinato) kale; others like the Siberian or Russian types; and others, the frilly Scotch kales. The different varieties all share yet another praiseworthy quality: they are very easy to grow from seed. Space thrifty, and so cold hardy that you can harvest it in the snow, kale more than earns its keep in the home vegetable garden.

Sow seeds directly in the garden about a month before the final frost of the season, or, for an earlier start, plant seeds indoor four weeks prior to that. Sow again in summer for a crop that will continue to produce through much, if not all, of the winter. Kale prefers cool temperatures (though it tolerates heat if well established) and is sweetened by a touch of frost.

1. Prepare. Loosen soil to a depth of about 12 inches using a shovel or tiller. Mix in some compost or slow-release fertilizer to provide plants with nutrients. Then rake the soil smooth, removing any large clumps and rocks.

2. Plant. Sow seeds in full sun about 3 to 4 inches apart, and ½ inch deep. Kale germinates readily in soil as cold as 45°F (7°C).

3. Grow. Water soil to keep it moist, and pull weeds that sprout nearby. When seedlings are 2 to 3 inches tall, thin so that young plants stand about 6 inches apart, using the thinnings in salads. Thin again in a couple of weeks to a final spacing of 12 inches apart so plants have room to grow and mature to their full size. Side-dress growing plants with a well-balanced fertilizer several times during their growing season. When plants have 7 to 9 leaves, start harvesting, cutting the outer leaves. A layer of straw mulch will help control weeds and conserve soil moisture.

4. Enjoy. Separate the stalks from the leaves when preparing kale for cooking. Enjoy the chopped ribs and leaves steamed, briefly, braised, boiled, or stir-fried, or blended raw in a smoothie. Kale is a popular ingredient in soups or in stews, and young leaves are excellent in salads. Any way you prepare it, kale is loaded with Vitamins A, C, K, calcium, and many other essential nutrients.



AT A GLANCE



Exposure: Full sun

Planting time: 4 weeks before the final frost. Sow again in mid- to late summer for a fall into winter crop.

Planting depth: 1/2 inch deep

Spacing in row: Sow seeds 3 to 4 inches apart, and thin to at least 12 inches apart as plants grow larger.

Time to harvest: 60 to 80 days from seed.



Grow kale in a large container, and provide it with a compost-rich soil mix. Fertilize a couple of times during the growing season.