

Home Gardening Series

Cauliflower

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Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained
Fertility – rich
pH – 6.0 to 7.0
Temperature – cool
Moisture – keep moist

Culture

Planting – early spring and late summer
Spacing – 15-24 x 24-36 inches
Hardiness – hardy annual
Fertilizer – heavy feeder

Cauliflower – *Brassica oleracea botrytis*

Cauliflower is a cultivated descendant of common cabbage, but just when or where it first appeared is uncertain. Wild cabbage has been in use for more than 4,000 years. Cabbage and cauliflower originated in Asia Minor. The oldest record of cauliflower dates back to 600 B.C., but there is no history of it in America until 1806.

Cauliflower is a cool-season vegetable that can be cooked, pickled or used as a salad delicacy. It is more difficult to grow than most of its relatives in the cabbage family. Cauliflower will not tolerate as much



heat or cold as cabbage or grow as well as broccoli in dry weather.

Cultural Practices

Planting Time

Starting cauliflower from transplants for both spring and fall crops is best. Do not transplant sooner than two to three weeks before the average frost-free date in the spring. Starting cauliflower early enough that it matures before the heat of summer is important, but not so early that it is injured by the cold. Make a fall planting for cauliflower when planting cabbage.

Use a starter fertilizer solution when transplanting.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

Space plants 18 to 24 inches apart in the row. Use the wider spacing for fall planting.

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Cultivars

Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Plants/ 100 Ft of Row	Remarks
Snowball	66	75	Good yield, medium size, white head.
Snow Crown	52	75	Early, white head.
Cheddar	58	66	Hybrid, orange turns a darker orange when cooked, holds well in spring.

If transplants are not available or growing your own plants is desired, handle them in the same way as cabbage or other plants. Start seed four to five weeks before the plants are needed. Plant seeds from 1/4- to 1/2-inch deep (10 seeds per inch), and water seeds during germination and growth of seedlings. Transplant the seedlings to the permanent location in the garden.

Care

Keep cauliflower plants growing vigorously from the seedling stage through harvest. Any interruption (extreme cold, heat, drought or plant damage) can abort the development of the edible portion. Cauliflower needs a consistent and ample supply of soil moisture. Side-dress the cauliflower plants with nitrogen fertilizer when they are half-grown.

When the head begins to form (shows 2 to 3 inches of white curd in between the upper leaves), it is ready to blanch. Tie the outer leaves together over the center of the plant to protect the head from sunburn and to keep it from turning green and developing an off-flavor. A self-blanching variety is named for a natural tendency to curl its leaves over its head. Under cool conditions, this variety blanches very well and tying is unnecessary.

Harvesting

The cauliflower head (curd) develops rapidly under proper growing conditions. It grows to 6 to 8 inches in diameter and is ready to harvest within 7 to 12 days after blanching. The mature head should be compact, firm and white. Harvest the head by cutting the main stem. Leave a few green outer leaves to protect the head. Cut the heads before they become too mature and develop a coarse, “ricey” appearance.

Common Problems

Cabbage worms and black rot are the two main problems. If plant growth is interrupted, the head may not develop or may develop poorly. Growth may be interrupted by young plants being held too long and hardening before transplanting, too much chilling before or after transplanting and drought.

diseases – club root, yellows or fusarium wilt, blackleg and black rot

insects – cabbage root fly maggots, cutworms, cabbage worms, cabbage looper worms, flea beetles, aphids

cultural – poor heading (interrupted growth due to chilling from too early planting, drying out or high temperatures)

Harvesting and Storage

days to maturity – 55 to 120 days from transplanting

harvest – Cut before flower sections begin to separate. The curd should be compact, firm, white and fairly smooth. Leave a few leaves surrounding head when harvested to prolong keeping quality.

approximate yields (per 10 feet of row) – 8 to 12 pounds

amount to raise per person – 8 pounds

storage – very cold (32 degrees F), moist (95 percent relative humidity) conditions, 2 to 4 weeks

preservation – freeze, pickle

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What causes leaves in the head and separation of the head into loose, smaller curds?

A. This is caused by cauliflower maturing during hot weather.

Q. Why does my late cauliflower planting fail to make satisfactory heads?

- A. It is difficult to make heads from late plantings because the plants are exposed to too much hot weather. Use starter fertilizer and ample preplant fertilizer on transplants. Do not crowd the cauliflower transplants.

Q. I am growing cauliflower for the first time. I read that it must be blanched to reach its best quality. What is blanching? When and how is it done?

- A. Blanching of cauliflower means protecting the heads from sunlight. Unblanched heads will be yellowish green, while blanched heads are pure white. When the head begins to enlarge, pull the outer leaves over the head and tie them together with a rubber band or soft twine.

Q. Are purple cauliflower and broccoflower grown in the same way as regular cauliflower?

- A. Broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage are all selections from the same genus (*Brassica oleracea*). Purple cauliflower is actually a type of broccoli that is purple. It resembles cauliflower's appearance and does not require blanching. The purple head turns green upon cooking.

Q. What causes browning of the curds?

- A. This condition is caused by downy mildew, which is brought on by wet conditions. It can be controlled by a suggested fungicide.

Q. Can cauliflower be grown in the spring as well as in the fall?

- A. Cauliflower grows better in the fall than in the spring. It will not grow well when temperatures average above 75 degrees F or when winter temperatures drop below 25 degrees F. Cauliflower requires constant moisture, high fertility levels and moderate temperatures. Improper planting time, low moisture or low fertility result in poor cauliflower.

Q. How long does it take cauliflower to go from seed to harvest stage?

- A. This depends on variety. Some new hybrid varieties of cauliflower, such as Snowball, yield a 6- to 9-inch head about 60 to 70 days after transplanting. Others require 100 days from transplanting.