

Kale and Collards

Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)

Zone: 4-24

It's time to think about planting those healthy green leafy vegetables we all should be eating. Countries like Italy and Portugal have been planting them for centuries. Recently, they have become more popular in the United States. Kale and Collards are green leafy cool season vegetables. They are members of the Brassicaceae (Cruciferae) family which includes broccoli and cabbage. They are grown for their leaves, which can be steamed, sautéed or added to soups. Collards have a large flat leaf, and I have had good luck with the variety "Georgia" here in San Andreas; these seem to be heat tolerant and continue growing into summer. Curly-leafed Kales grow just as easily, and an Italian variety called "lacinato" does particularly well. I have seen it in the grocery store sold as "Dino Kale"; I am not sure where that comes from, but it is certainly delicious. There are several interesting varieties to choose from.

Collards and Kale are one of the most nutritious vegetables around. They contain good amounts of vitamin K, A and C. You can look up the amazing benefits of Kale, Collards and the Cruciferous family on WHfoods.com. This is a great site to see the nutritional benefits of all fruits and vegetables. Steaming helps retain the most nutrition, but I love them sautéed with a little bacon and onion.

Whether you plant Collards or Kale, they are easy to grow. They are typically planted in late summer for a fall crop, or early spring, for a spring into summer crop. Sow seeds in the ground and thin to 1 ½ to 3 feet apart or you can set out transplants. Mine were started in the hoop house a couple of weeks ago during that warm period, and they are doing great. Collards and Kale can grow up to 2' -3' tall, so they do get pretty big. Harvest the delicious leaves by removing them from the outside of the plant. Both Kale and Collard varieties seem to benefit from a light frost, which seems to sweeten their flavor. For colder areas, I would suggest a frost cover. I've had great luck with them in containers; not only are they beautiful to look at, but easy to grow. Water regularly and fertilize with a fish emulsion or manure tea. Give it a try; I'm sure you will find them delicious and fun to grow.

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