Cabbage

Grow

Cabbage is a leafy vegetable, a cole crop of the Mustard family (*Brassicaceae*). Cabbage plants can tolerate frost and even temperatures as low as 20°F for short periods. It grows best in regions where there is a long, cool growing season with temperatures 45-75°F. It matures for harvest prior to extreme heat. Cabbage is typically transplanted. It can be started from seed indoors 8 weeks before the last frost in spring. Plant seedlings 1 foot apart and space rows 2-3 feet apart. Full sun and sandy loam soil are preferred. Cabbage comes to harvest in 80-100 days from seed. Exposed to severe frost, too little moisture, or too much heat, it will not form a head but instead bolt and go directly to seed. Cabbage grows from August-December and March-May with peak harvest in December and May.[1-2]

Fun Fact: When a cabbage is sliced in half, an outline of a "tree" is visible in the center.

China is the biggest producer of cabbage

There are at least 400 different varieties of cabbage grown in the world. The most common varieties in the United States are green, red, purple and savoy. Asian countries have the largest production—China (which produces 47% of the world total), India, and Russia.[1-3]

Fun Fact: Cabbage originated in the Mediterranean 2,000 years ago. It was introduced to America in 1541 by French Explorer Jacques Cartier, who planted it in Canada.[2]

Choose

Regardless of color or type of cabbage, it is important to choose well-formed heads of cabbage with even color. It should look crisp and fresh. Leaves should be compact and smooth, with firm stems. A good head of cabbage is heavy for its size. Do not choose cabbage that is wilted, discolored or has molded leaves or cracked heads. Severe damage to the outer leaves could mean insect damage or decay in the inner core.[1-4]

Store

Leafy greens, like cabbage, should be stored immediately in a tightly covered container in the coldest part of the refrigerator (32-36°F, 90-98% relative humidity). Keep it cold, moist and well-ventilated. Store it uncut. Leave the outer leaves in place until it is time to wash and prepare the cabbage. Red and green cabbage will keep for about 2 weeks while savoy cabbage will keep for about 1 week.

If you need to store a partial head of cabbage, cover it tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate. The vitamin C content of cabbage starts to quickly degrade once it has been cut, so the rest should be used within 1-2 days.[1-3]

Fun Fact: The top of the cabbage is the crown. Outside leaves are called wrapper leaves. Inside is the compact portion. A midrib runs down the center of each leaf. Where the cabbage connects to the plant is the butt.[1-2]

Use

Cabbage is eaten raw, in coleslaw or other salads. Mixes of shredded cabbage (red and green), carrots or broccoli are available for slaw or salad. Cabbage can also be boiled, sautéed, steamed or pickled. Eating cabbage raw offers the most nutrients followed by sautéing.[2-4]

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Vegetable

Cabbage

Teach

Classroom Activity
Cabbage is eaten different ways around the world.

Steps:
- Students research and present findings on how greens (cabbage) are eaten in their family and other cultures.

Fun Fact: Cabbage is Russia's national food. Russians eat about 7 times as much cabbage as the average North American. World Cabbage Day is February 3.[3]

Red Cabbage pH Indicator
Boiled water and red cabbage can be used to test the pH of common products. Red cabbage contains chemicals that cause the juice to change color when it is mixed with certain other chemicals. The cabbage juice will turn pink when mixed with acids, and blue/green when mixed with bases.

Classroom Activity
Materials Needed:
- 1 head of red cabbage
- Medium-sized bowl
- Boiled water
- Blender
- Strainer
- Plastic container
- Clear plastic cups
- Baking soda
- Other liquids (lemon juice, vinegar, soda)

Steps:
1. Finely chop cabbage into a medium-sized bowl.
2. Cover the cabbage with boiled water for 5 minutes. Pour into a blender. Blend.
3. Strain the juice into a plastic container. Pour an equal amount of cabbage juice into each small plastic cup.
4. Add 1 teaspoon of baking soda to all but one of the cups (control). The baking soda will turn the cabbage juice blue. See how much of each liquid it takes to turn the juice back to its original color (control). If the juice stays blue, the liquid is not an acid.[1,5]

Eat

One cup of raw, shredded cabbage has about 16 calories. For cooked shredded cabbage, ½ cup is about 17 calories. Both are a good source of folate and an excellent source of vitamins C and K. Cabbage is cholesterol free and low in fat and sodium.[2-4,6-7]

Fun Fact: Cabbage is a cruciferous vegetable, like bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, collard greens, kale, Swiss chard, turnips and turnip greens.[1-4]

Our body needs folate for blood cell, DNA and genetic development. Vitamin C acts as an antioxidant, protects us from infections, aids in healing, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, and helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants. Vitamin K helps our body to clot blood and make proteins needed for our blood, bones and kidneys. Cruciferous vegetables, like cabbage, contain isothiocyanates (suphoraphane and indoles), phytochemicals with anti-cancer properties. They help neutralize free radicals that may damage cells. Cruciferous veggies also have dithiolthiones, which aid immune function, and glucosinolates, sulfur compounds which give them their pungent aroma and spicy taste while helping to fight cancer. Purple and red cabbage contain anthocyanidins which may help with maintaining brain and immune function.[2-4,6-8]

Fun Fact: The name cabbage derives from the French word *caboche*, which means head.[2]

Find

For more cabbage facts and resources, visit:
1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. California Harvest of the Month, http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
4. Fruits & Veggies More Matters®, www.fruitsveggiesmorematters.org
5. PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org
6. USDA Food Composition Databases, http://ndb.nal.usda.gov
7. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org
8. Leafy Greens Council, http://leafy-greens.org

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