

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

# Broccoli

**B**roccoli is a cool-season plant in the same family as cabbage and cauliflower. It is known as a cole crop. Broccoli can be grown in both the fall and the spring and can be eaten many ways.

### Varieties

- **Marathon**—is cold-tolerant, so it can be planted in the early spring or early fall.
- **Artwork**—grows plenty of side shoots once the main shoot is removed.
- **Green Comet**—often sold as transplants.
- **Emerald Crown**—has a larger head on a short plant; grows well in Kentucky during the fall.
- **Imperial**—yields dark green heads and does well during hot summer days (less than 80 degrees F).



Green Comet  
(All-America Selections)



Harvested Imperial  
(Ben Yates)



Marathon  
(Rachel Rudolph)



Artwork  
(All-American Selections)



Emerald Crown variety  
(Ben Yates)

## How much to plant

For a family of four, plant 12 to 16 plants. Each plant can grow many heads of broccoli.

## How and when to plant

Broccoli does best when young plants are transplanted into the garden. For more information on transplanting, see *Preparing Your Garden* (NEP-219) at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/NEP/NEP219/NEP219.pdf>. Place plants 18 to 24 inches apart in a row. If sowing broccoli seed into the garden, place seed  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch deep and cover with soil. Once plants appear from the soil, thin them to 18 to 24 inches apart.

Several varieties of broccoli do well in Kentucky. A cold-tolerant type, such as the Marathon variety, can be planted early in the spring (mid- to late March). Broccoli planted in the late summer for fall harvest should be transplanted from July to August. Mature broccoli does not grow well in weather over 80 degrees F during the day. If direct seeding, plant seeds a week or two ahead of the recommended transplanting dates.

## Pests and diseases

Caterpillars cause the most problems for broccoli. They feed on the leaves and the head of the plant. They can be hard to see because many of them are green and blend in with the plant. Turn the leaves over to look for caterpillars. If you see white butterflies flying around your garden during the day, they are most likely imported cabbageworm butterflies. The eggs they lay on the plants will turn into the caterpillars that become pests. Dark moths, called cabbage looper moths, also lay eggs that turn into caterpillars. Flea beetles and aphids can also be pests of broccoli. If you notice problems with insect damage, call your local [county Extension office](#) for advice on treatment and control, or consult the UK Cooperative Extension publication, *Growing Vegetables at Home in Kentucky* (ID-128) at [www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf).



Imported cabbageworm caterpillar on a broccoli leaf. These caterpillars can eat entire leaves until almost nothing is left. (Ben Yates)



Flea beetles can be a frequent pest of broccoli in spring. They make small holes in the leaves. (Rachel Rudolph)

## Harvesting

A large central head of tightly packed flower buds will develop. This is the part that is eaten. The size of the central head will vary depending on the variety. Usually the head will be about 3 to 6 inches across when it is ready to pick. Cut the head off 5 or 6 inches down the stem.

After the large central head is cut out, smaller side heads can grow and be harvested. The side heads will be 1 to 3 inches across. Many harvests can come from the same broccoli plant. The broccoli variety Artwork yields many side heads and does well during the heat of summer.

When broccoli is grown in high temperatures (warmer than 80 degrees F), the heads will not be as smooth, and they will begin to flower. Heads should be harvested before the flower buds open. When broccoli flowers, it is no longer edible.



Under high temperatures, the heads will not be smooth, and they will begin to flower.

*(MaryJo Smith, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources)*



A broccoli head forming and is almost ready to harvest.

*(Rachel Rudolph)*



Cut the central head of broccoli from the plant about 5 to 6 inches down the stem.

*(Rachel Rudolph)*



After the central head has been harvested, the plant continues to make smaller side heads that can be harvested.

*(Rachel Rudolph)*

## Serving

Wash broccoli under cold running water. Trim the leaves and peel the stalk.

- **To steam:** Place on a rack above boiling water and steam 6 to 8 minutes. Rinse with cold water. Drain.
- **To boil:** Place in a saucepan with 1 inch of boiling water. Cover and cook 5 to 7 minutes.

- **To microwave:** Place broccoli in a microwave-safe dish. Add 1 inch of water and cover with a glass lid or plastic wrap. Microwave 3 to 4 minutes or until crisp-tender.

## Storing

Once harvested, there is no need to wash broccoli before storing it. Broccoli can keep in the refrigerator for up to two weeks at 40 degrees F. Wash broccoli right before you use it.

## Summary

### Varieties

There are many varieties of broccoli. Broccoli varieties that grow well in Kentucky are: Marathon, Artwork, Green Comet, Emerald Crown, and Imperial.

### How much to plant

For a family of four people, plant 12 to 16 plants. Each plant can grow many stems of broccoli.

### How and when to plant

When growing broccoli make sure to leave space between the plants. Broccoli grows best in cool weather, less than 80 degrees F.

### Pest and diseases

Caterpillars cause the most problems for broccoli. They feed on the leaves and the head of broccoli.

### Harvesting

A large central broccoli head will grow. This is the part that is eaten. The head will be about 3 inches to 6 inches across when it is ready to pick.

### Serving

Broccoli can be eaten raw or cooked. To cook, one can steam, boil, or microwave.

### Storing

Broccoli can keep in the refrigerator for up to two weeks at 40 degrees F.

### Authors:

Rachel Rudolph, Extension Vegetable Specialist,  
Rick Durham, Extension Consumer  
Horticulture Specialist

### Contributors:

Jann Knappage, Food System Specialist,  
Katie Shultz, Marketing and Media Specialist