

Home Gardening Series

# Collards

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## Environment

**Light** – sunny  
**Soil** – well-drained  
**Fertility** – medium-rich  
**pH** – 5.5 to 6.5  
**Temperature** – cool  
**Moisture** – moist

## Culture

**Planting** – direct seed  
**Spacing** – 3-4 x 30-36 inches, thin  
**Hardiness** – cool season, hardy  
**Fertilizer** – medium feeder

## Collards – *Brassica oleracea acephala*

Collards, one of the oldest members of the cabbage group, originated in the eastern Mediterranean or Asia Minor. These leafy, non-heading, wild forms of cabbage were first used for food in prehistoric times. They were cultivated by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and either the Romans or the Celts introduced them to Britain and France. They reached the British Isles in 400 B.C. The first mention of collards in America was in 1669, but they may have existed here much earlier.

Collards (also known as tree cabbage or non-heading cabbage) are cool-season vegetable greens that are rich in vitamins A and C and minerals. They grow better in warm weather and can tolerate more cold weather in the late fall than any other member of the cabbage family. Although collards



are popular substitutes for cabbage in the South, they can also be grown in northern areas because of their tolerance to frost. Collards are close relatives to kale.

## Cultural Practices

### Planting Time

Plant in early spring for summer harvest and again in midsummer for fall and early winter harvest.

### Spacing and Depth of Planting

Sow seed 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep. Thin seedlings to 6 to 12 inches apart to allow enough space for plants to mature. Thinned plants may be eaten. Allow at least 3 feet between rows because plants become large. For early production in fall or spring, use transplants.

### Care

If you maintain ample soil moisture during hot periods in the summer, collards will produce an abundant harvest.

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## Cultivars

Variety	Days to Maturity	Seed/100 Ft of Row	Disease Resistance or Tolerance	Remarks
Georgia	75	1/4 oz		Large, crumpled, blue-green leaves, tolerant to heat and cold, good yield.
Vates	76	1/4 oz		Large, crumpled, dark-green leaves, hold color in cold weather, resistant to bolting, good yield.
Flash	78	1/4 oz		Smooth, broad leaf. Highly uniform yields, very slow bolting, rapid regrowth.
Champion	75	1/4 oz		Improved Vates variety, dark-green leaves, increased bolting resistance and winter hardiness, higher yields.
Heavi-crop	68	1/4 oz		Smooth, deep-green leaf, medium size plant, tolerant to heat and cold, anthocyanin free.
Green Glaze	79	1/4 oz	Cabbage worm, cabbage looper	Bright green, smooth leaves, heat and frost resistant, slow bolting, non-heading.

## Harvesting

All green parts of the plant are edible and may be harvested at any time during the growing season. Plants grown 6 inches apart can be cut at ground level when they reach 6 to 10 inches in height. As an alternative method of harvesting, you can pick the large leaves when the plants are 10 to 12 inches high. This allows younger leaves to develop for later use.

Some gardeners prefer the young, tender leaves and cut the inner rosette of young growth. This “loose head” may be blanched by tying the outer leaves together to keep out the sun. Frost improves the flavor in the fall.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. Are collard greens nutritious?

A. They are extremely nutritious and have a high content of vitamins A and C. The taste is similar to cabbage. A light frost near harvesttime improves the flavor of collard greens.

### Q. How do you harvest collard greens? Should you harvest only the older, mature leaves or pull up the entire plant?

A. Collard greens can be harvested either way. However, maximum yields result if the leaves from the bottom of the plant are harvested before they become too old. The first harvest generally occurs after 60 days.

### Q. The stems of my collard plants rot once foliage is removed. The decayed area smells foul.

A. This is bacterial soft rot which enters through the broken areas where the leaves were removed. This can be controlled with a spray of fungicide containing copper sulphate or copper bordeaux mix at harvesting.