

# Growing Your Own

## A beginner's guide to gardening

### Collards

**C**ollards (or collard greens) are quick and easy to grow. They can be planted in early spring and can withstand frosty weather. They can also be planted later in the summer to mature in the fall after the weather becomes cooler.

#### Varieties

Most collards do well in Kentucky. Some common varieties are:

- Top Bunch
- Flash
- Vates
- Champion
- Georgia Southern

#### How much to plant

Collard seed is small. One ounce of seed will sow over 1,000 feet of row. A package of 100 seeds will plant a row about 20 feet long. Collards yield about one pound of leaves for each foot of row. Plant about 5 to 10 feet of row for each person in the family. Plant more if you wish to freeze some for later use.

#### How and when to plant

Collards are a cool season crop that yields best when allowed to mature in late spring or late fall. Use the following information to know when to plant.



Top Bunch

(Photo: Johnny's Selected Seeds, johnnyseeds.com)



Champion

(Photo: Johnny's Selected Seeds, johnnyseeds.com)

Region	Early planting	Late planting
Central & Eastern Kentucky	March 15	July 15
Western Kentucky	March 1	August 15

You may also find collard transplants for sale. The transplants are planted about three to four weeks later than dates to plant seeds. Leaves on plants from a seed are ready to harvest in about six weeks. Transplants have leaves ready for harvest in two to three weeks.

Plant seeds about 1 inch apart (10-12 seeds per foot of row) and cover lightly, about ¼- to ½-inch deep. When seedlings are about 2 inches tall, thin the planting by pulling up some seedlings to leave plants about 3 to 4 inches apart. The small plants



you removed can be washed and used in soups or salads. Transplants should be placed in a hole 2 to 3 inches deep and watered well. Then add soil back into the hole around the plant. Space transplants 4 to 6 inches apart in the row. For more guidance on direct seeding or transplanting, refer to *Growing Your Own: Preparing Your Garden* (NEP-219) at [www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/NEP/NEP219/NEP219.pdf](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/NEP/NEP219/NEP219.pdf).

## Pests and diseases

As a rule, spring crops of collards suffer less from insects and diseases than fall plantings. The most harm from common insects comes from caterpillars. Aphids may sometimes pose a problem but can be simply washed from the harvested leaves. Cutworms may feed on spring transplants. 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).

## Harvesting

Collards can be harvested in two ways:

- Pull up the entire plant and remove the leaves.
- Keep plant in the ground and only remove the large lower leaves. The bud can keep growing to provide more leaves to harvest later.



(Photo: Fox & Hen Farm, LLC)



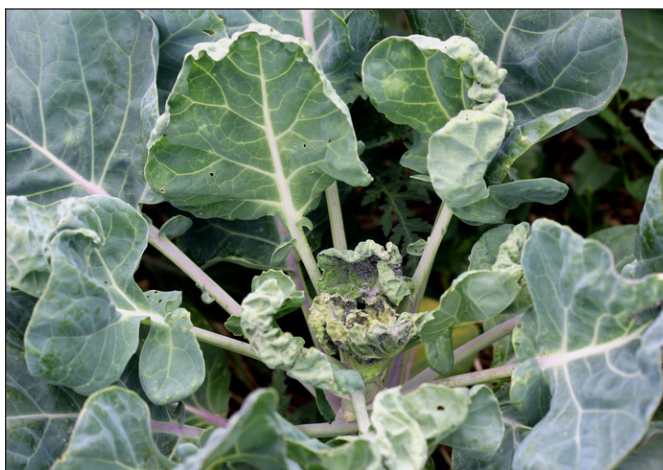
Cabbage looper

(Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org)



Damage to a collard green plant by caterpillars.

(Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org)



Cabbage aphids may cause this type of damage.

(Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org)



To remove leaves, simply break them off close to the stem. They are easy to break unless wilted by dry weather. You can also cut them with scissors or a knife. The best quality is when leaves are harvested in the morning. For the spring crop, remove the whole plant for a final harvest as weather becomes warm and the flavor of the leaves start to get strong. For the fall crop, it is better to only remove bottom leaves as they get large. Plants will keep making leaves into October or November. Leaf flavor is not as strong on fall-grown plants.

## Clean Up

After the last spring harvest of collards, remove all plants. Lightly till the soil with a hoe or rake. Plant a new crop of unrelated summer vegetables such as beans, squash, or Swiss chard. Clean up the fall collards once cold weather causes leaves to wilt. Plants may be tilled into the soil to break down or placed in a compost pile.



## Serving

Collard greens are an excellent source of vitamin A, vitamin C, and folate. They are also a good source of calcium and fiber. A two-cup serving provides 100 percent of the daily value for vitamin A, which is important for vision and the immune system.



Collards can be harvested multiple times by removing leaves from the bottom of the plant first and working your way up as leaves mature.

(Photo: Rick Durham, UK CES Horticulture Specialist)



Sometimes collards planted in the spring will survive the hot summer temperatures and can be harvested again in the fall when new leaves are produced.

(Photo: Rick Durham, UK CES Horticulture Specialist)

Collard greens can be quite tough when eaten raw unless they are very finely chopped for a salad. Before using, rinse collard greens under cold running water and pat dry before chopping. As a delicious side to any meal, simmer chopped greens with a chopped onion in low-sodium chicken broth until they are tender and wilted. Collards can also be sautéed with garlic until soft and served as a side dish or can be added to any stir-fry. Add chopped collard greens to soups and stews towards the end of the cooking process for an added boost of vitamins.



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## Storage

Refrigerate collard greens in a plastic bag for up to five days and sometimes longer.