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Do You Have Tips For Growing Cauliflower and Celery?

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ask A Specialist

A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Tips For Growing Cauliflower and Celery?

Dan Drost answers:*

Cauliflower and celery can be two of the more difficult vegetables to grow successfully in the vegetable garden. Both are cool-season crops that prefer temperatures in the 60 to 70 degree range for best performance. At higher temperatures, cauliflower will not head normally and celery will produce tough woody stalks. Both require adequate water and fertilizer for optimal performance.

Here are some things you can do to encourage head formation on cauliflower.

- Cauliflower should be grown as an early spring or fall crop. Most gardeners have success with the "Snowball" cauliflower varieties as these mature in 55 to 65 days from transplanting. It is best to grow five to six week old transplants and plant them two to three weeks before the last spring frost.
- Grow them at an 18 by 18 inch spacing in soils that have been enriched with well-rotted manure or compost. Once the plants are growing, be sure to avoid water stress by mulching around the plants with grass, straw, newspaper or other organic materials. These help keep the soil cool and moist. Water so that the plants never dry out, especially when the heads start to form.
- Avoid fertilizer stress by suppling the plants with a complete fertilizer preplant and with additional nitrogen five to six weeks after transplanting.
- Hot weather closed to heading will affect the appearance and quality of the head. Always tie the leaves around the head when you can see it is the size of a silver dollar. This helps keep the head white and makes it less bitter.
- For fall cauliflower, plant in late July for harvests in late September or early October. Heavy frosts on the plant before the head forms will delay development or may injure the growing point, so adjust planting to give the plants time to mature in your production area. Harvest the heads about two weeks after tying the leaves around the head.

Here are some things you can do to encourage sweet, tender stalks of celery.

- Celery requires from 100 to 120 days after transplanting to mature. Therefore, plant it early in the spring several weeks before the last frost.
- It is best to start with transplants. These require 12 weeks to be of sufficient size for planting in the garden. When transplanting, be sure to incorporate plenty of compost or well-rotted manure. Plant 8 by 8 inches apart. This close spacing helps to blanch the stalks and smother weeds.
- Once the crop is established, mulch heavily with straw, grass clipping or other organic

materials.

- Like cauliflower, celery likes moist soil. Do not let the soil dry out. Moisture stress is the main cause of stringy, tough stalks. Celery also requires large amounts of fertilizer. Apply a complete fertilizer with the compost and then after transplanting, apply one half tablespoon of nitrogen fertilizer per four plants every two weeks throughout the summer. Too little fertilizer will not allow the stalks to grow tall and succulent.
- Harvest whole plants when they begin to size by cutting them below the soil. Some gardeners blanch celery with paper wraps, by mounding soil around the plants or by growing them in a drain tile. Blanching does not affect flavor but does lighten the color of the stalks.

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