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GARDEN NOTES

WHEN IT'S COLD, THINK COLE CROPS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Cole crops take some of the worry out of vegetable gardening in Northern Utah. The word “cole” comes from the German word meaning, “cabbage.” It refers to all vegetables that fall into the cabbage family. Cole crops are hardy and grow best in the cool spring or fall.

The most popular crop in the cole family is cabbage, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. It can be started in the garden anytime after the winter snow cover has melted in the spring. Most cabbage plants are bought as transplants from a local garden or nursery.

“This insures that the plants have a good start, but cabbage can also be started from seeds sown directly in the garden,” Goodspeed says. “Space plantings a week or two apart, so you won't be overwhelmed with too much cabbage by early summer. Some recommended varieties include ‘Savoy Ace,’ ‘Danish Ball Head,’ ‘Harvester Queen Hybrid’ and the red ‘Ruby Ball Hybrid.’”

Broccoli is even a little more hardy than cabbage, he says. It can be planted as early as the first weeks of March. Again, like cabbage, it can be purchased as a transplant or directly sown as seed. Harvest the heads before any yellow appears on the flowers. After the initial harvest, many varieties send up smaller heads around the stock throughout the summer months. Try “Packman Hybrid,” “Green Comet Hybrid” and “Premium Crop Hybrid.”

“Cauliflower is a little harder to grow than broccoli or cabbage, but well worth the trouble,” Goodspeed says. “Plant it a little later in the spring than cabbage—about early to mid April. If planted too early and exposed to hard frosts, cauliflower sometimes goes to seed or sets small heads.”

To get pretty white cauliflower like the grocery stores have, blanch the heads, he suggests. This is done by simply tying the leaves up around the head to protect it from the sun. Some heads turn green when exposed to the sun, but this does not usually affect the flavor. There are purple head varieties that do not need to be blanched. Some good white varieties include “Early Snowball,” “Ravella,” “Snow Crown Hybrid,” and “Self Blanching.”

“One member of the cole family that is not planted enough is kohlrabi,” Goodspeed says. “It has the flavor of a sweet turnip. The edible bulb part grows above ground and is not bothered

by maggots and other worms that usually get into turnips and radishes. It looks a little like a small flying saucer.”

He says kohlrabi grows best in the cool seasons, but survives even in the hot summer. Both white and purple varieties are available, with the white having a slightly milder flavor. Simply peel it, apply a dash of salt, and eat like an apple fresh from the garden. It can also be added to a salad or cooked.

“Brussels sprouts are also in the cole family, although I usually do not recommend them for most home gardens,” Goodspeed says. “They are a long season crop, and a little harder to grow in Utah than other cole crops. Brussels sprouts are also notorious for attracting every pest in the county. Aphids, loopers and other assorted pests are drawn to the plants, then proceed to jump onto the other cole crops once they've discovered a tasty garden spot.”

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