

Collard Greens

Grow

Collards are a leafy green vegetable, part of the cabbage or *Brassicaceae* family. Their scientific name is *Brassica oleracea*. Collards can grow as a loose bouquet or as a head like other cabbages. They are most associated with cuisine of the southern United States.¹⁻³

Collards grow in a variety of soils. They grow best in well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0-6.5. Collards prefer cooler temperatures, like in the early spring and fall. Collard seeds can be planted in mid-summer or early spring. Place seeds in moist soil, ½-¾ inch deep. Collard transplants can be set out in early spring or late summer. Plant collards in rows 3 feet apart. Spacing within the rows depends on how collards will be harvested (when half-grown - 10-18 inches or when fully grown - 15-18 inches). Apply water after planting. Frequent watering or irrigation is needed. In exceptionally hot weather, water collards at least ¼ inch per day. Collards take 68-79 days of growing to fully mature.¹

Fun Fact: Collards are the oldest leafy green within the cabbage family. They were grown by the ancient Greeks and Romans.²

Choose

Blue Max, Georgia Southern, Heavi Crop, Morris and Vates collard varieties have grown well in North Carolina. Collards can be harvested using multiple techniques. They can be cut when the plants are young, which allows the plant to grow back and be harvested multiple times. The entire plant can also be cut when collards are half-grown or fully grown. Or tender leaves can be harvested from fully grown plants. Usually, the leaves toward the center of the plant are smaller and less mature than those toward the outside of the plant.¹ Leaves should be dark green.¹⁻⁴

Since “cooking” greens like collards grow best in cooler weather, they are often considered to be a fall or winter vegetable. These greens can be grown and harvested almost year-round. Collards taste sweeter after a frost.¹⁻²



Store

Store immediately in a tightly covered container in the coldest part of refrigerator (32-36°F, 90-98% relative humidity). Store uncut and untrimmed. Leave outer leaves in place. Keep away from ethylene producing fruits (apples, bananas, pears, and tomatoes).^{1,4}

Blanch fresh, washed, and trimmed collards in boiling water for 3 minutes. Then, place in a bowl of ice water to stop cooking. Drain the collards in a colander. Place in a freezer-safe storage bag. Freeze immediately.¹

Fun Fact: Although collards are most popular in Southern states, the buzz is spreading to other parts of the U.S.¹

Use

Collards can be eaten raw or cooked. The stems and woody pieces of the collards should be removed and the collards should be washed well under cold, running water to remove any soil or sand stuck to the leaves.¹⁻⁴

Although collards are usually cooked before serving, they can be used fresh in dishes like tacos, wraps, salads, or sandwiches. Collards can be steamed, stewed, cooked in broth, or added to stir fries or other recipes to add a boost of nutrients. If collards are cooked in a broth or liquid, the nutrients can leach out of the plant and into the liquid. Be careful not to overcook.^{1,3-4}

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Teach

Collards and other produce are available through the North Carolina Farm to School Program and served in School Nutrition Programs. The N.C. Farm to School Program was created by the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services to offer a system for schools across the state to receive fresh produce grown by local farmers. To learn more about farm to school in our state, visit www.ncfarmtoschool.com (N.C. Farm to School Program) or www.farmtoschoolcoalitionnc.org (Farm to School Coalition of North Carolina).

Fun Fact: In 1975, Ayden, North Carolina named their town's annual festival "The Ayden Collard Festival". It takes place in September and is over 30 years old!⁵

Class Activity - Collards and Culture

Dark green leafy vegetables are prepared and eaten in a variety of ways in different parts of the world and in different cultures. This activity allows students to explore traditions, cultures, geography, agriculture and nutrition.

Steps:

1. Ask students to interview neighbors and/or family members about their consumption of collards and other dark leafy greens.
2. Instruct students to identify, through their interviews with family members and neighbors or research from cookbooks or the internet, a recipe for collards they would like to try. Encourage students to make the recipe at home, take a photo of the recipe steps and completed dish, and conduct a taste test with their family. If they are unable to make the recipe, they can poll their family members to see who would like to try the recipe.
3. Ask students to bring in the written recipe, any photos from making it, and the results of the taste test or poll.
4. Have students share their findings through a written report, class discussion, a display or presentation. Students should express what they learned about collard greens, the recipe, and/or their experiences.

Eat

Collards are an excellent source of vitamins A, C and K and a good source of calcium and fiber. Raw collards are an excellent source of folate. Dark greens, like collards, are also a source of lutein. Collards are low calorie, free of cholesterol and fat and very low in sodium. One cup of raw, chopped collards has 12 calories and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked, chopped collards has 31 calories.^{1-4,6}

Fun Fact: Vitamin A can be found in plant and animal sources, but plant sources have phytonutrients.⁶

Our body needs folate for blood cell, DNA and genetic development. Pregnant women need to make sure they get enough folate very day. Vitamin A promotes normal vision, helps regulate the immune system, protects against infection, and supports the growth and health of cells and tissues. It works as an antioxidant in the form of carotenoids. Vitamin C protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, keeps our gums healthy, and helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants. Vitamin K helps our body to clot blood and make proteins needed for our blood, bones and kidneys. Calcium helps us build strong bones and teeth, our muscles contract and heart beat, and our blood clot if we are bleeding. Insoluble fiber helps with digestion. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol. Lutein helps maintain healthy vision.^{1-4,6}

Fun Fact: Depending on variety, collards can be called cabbage-collards, tree-cabbage or non-heading cabbage.²

Find

For more collard facts and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
3. Produce for Better Health Foundation, <https://fruitsandveggies.org>
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
5. Ayden Collard Festival, <https://www.aydencollardfestival.com>
6. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org