



Vegetable Gardening Hints



Chinese Cabbage (Pe-tsai) in the Home Garden

New hybrids of Chinese cabbage being grown in Louisiana make an excellent substitute for head lettuce in salads and sandwiches. Since head lettuce does not always grow well in Louisiana, and these new hybrids do grow extremely well, you may want to substitute Chinese cabbage for lettuce.

The translation for pe-tsai is "white vegetable," not Chinese cabbage. This vegetable is rarely used like cabbage. Most varieties have a long or oval head with a crisp, firm interior. The leaves are slightly wrinkled and are a lighter, brighter green than those of regular cabbage. The broad white midrib is very crisp and has a mild flavor. Color, texture and flavor of the leaves resemble head lettuce leaves more than cabbage leaves.

Varieties

Most varieties will be ready to harvest 50 to 80 days from seeding. Harvest when heads are solid. Heads may weigh from 3 to 5 pounds, or as much as 10 to 12 pounds, depending on the variety and row spacing.

There are two general types of head shape. The chihli types are tall and slender. Good hybrids of this type are Jade Pagoda, Michihli (non-hybrid) and Monument.

Napa (che-foo) types have shorter but thicker heads. Napa varieties that have done very well in the Deep South include China Pride, China Flash, Kasumi and Yuki.

A stalkier form of Chinese cabbage is the pak choi (bok choy) type. These are prized for their prominent petioles. Several varieties that grow well here are Joi Choi, Mei Qing Choi and Japanese White Celery Mustard.

Culture

Plant Chinese cabbage seed from August through the first week in October. September is generally the best month to plant in Louisiana. You may start seed

indoors during January in south Louisiana or February in north Louisiana. A spring crop, especially if planted late, is a risk since bolting, or flowering, is likely to occur and ruin the head. Tip burn is common in che-foos grown at 85 degrees F or higher.

Before planting, bury or chop in about one pound of 8-8-8 fertilizer, or its equivalent, down 25 feet of row. Chinese cabbage may be seeded directly in the row, or transplants may be produced and set out. These transplants may be started in peat pots, jiffy cubes or flats. Be careful not to damage the roots of plants when transplanting. Transplants can be ready to set in the field three weeks from the time the seed are sown. Since the seed are small, a firm seed bed is important. Plant seed shallowly, about 1/4 inch deep, on raised, well-drained beds. The seed may be drilled and thinned to a 10- or 12-inch spacing between plants for pak choi types and 18 inches for che-foo and chihli types. Keep soil moist, especially in late summer, to speed germination. Before heading, the plants will form a rosette of leaves and look like mustard. Sidedress with about one pound of 8-8-8 or 1/2 cup of ammonium nitrate per 25 feet of row. Do this about one month after seeding or two weeks after setting transplants.



Napa or Che-foo

Pests

Chinese cabbage has few serious pests. A regular fungicidal spray program with maneb plus zinc or with chlorothalonil will control foliage diseases. Beetles and worms which chew holes in the leaves will be controlled by using Sevin as needed. To control worms, you can use Bacillus (Bt) sprays also. If aphids are a problem, don't use Sevin; instead use malathion. Cultivate or chop weeds shallowly because the crop's roots are near the surface. Your county agent can help solve any problems you may have.

Using Chinese Cabbage

Chinese cabbage is a fair source of vitamins and minerals, and it's low in calories. It is generally used in salads as you use head lettuce rather than like coleslaw. It's often used in Chinese recipes. Steaming cabbage a short time over boiling water is preferable to boiling it in water. Begin cooking the white midrib first, then add the leaf blades near the end.

Use it on hamburgers, sandwiches or to garnish the salad plate. Make relish sticks from the white midrib to add contrasting color and flavor to relish plates, or use as a substitute for celery in potato, tuna or other salads.



A head wrapped in plastic film will last several months in the refrigerator. If the head is cut open, protect it or it will wilt almost as rapidly as lettuce.

For salads, separate cabbage leaf by leaf. Wash and drain, then refrigerate to crisp. It will not turn brown as regular lettuce does. Tear the leaves as you would lettuce. Chop the tender white midrib to add extra crispness and flavor. Use cabbage alone, or combine it with lettuce or other salad greens, such as fresh spinach, green onions or celery. Use your favorite salad dressing and other condiments. Whether it is served alone or in combination with other vegetables, it's delicious with an old-fashioned bacon dressing for wilted salad.

Wilted Salad

3 slices bacon	3/4 cup water
2 T. bacon drippings	1/4 cup vinegar (wine, tarragon, etc.)
2 T. flour	1 qt. coarsely chopped greens
1 T. sugar	Other vegetables, if desired
1 t. salt	

Cut bacon in small pieces; fry until crisp. Drain bacon. Leave 2 tablespoons drippings in pan over medium heat. Blend in flour, sugar, salt. When mixture is light tan, stir in water and vinegar. Cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Pour the hot dressing over greens, add bacon and toss.



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