



Vegetable Gardening Tips

Growing Information for the Home Gardener Series



Chinese Cabbage (Pe-tsai)

Chinese cabbage grows well in Louisiana vegetable gardens. Chinese cabbage is an excellent substitute for head lettuce in salads and sandwiches and delicious prepared in traditional Asian cuisine. In the United States, Chinese cabbage is sometimes referred to as Pe-tsai. The translation for pe-tsai is “white vegetable.”

Varieties

Chinese cabbage come in two distinct types: Napa Cabbage and Bok Choy.

Napa Cabbage *Brassica rapa subsp. pekinensis*

Napa cabbage have long or oval heads with a crisp, firm interior. The leaves are slightly wrinkled and are a lighter and brighter green than those of cabbage typically grown in Louisiana. 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 but are tall and elongated. Varieties that perform well include Rubicon, China Pride, China Flash, Kasumi and Yuki.



Bok Choy *Brassica rapa subsp. chinensis*

Bok choy is called a Chinese cabbage but does not form a head as traditional cabbages do. Instead, Bok choy forms an enlarged or swollen stem. The stem is used in stir-fry and other traditional Asian cuisine. Varieties that perform well include Joi Choi, Mei Qing Choi and Japanese White Celery Mustard.

Cultural Practices

Plant Chinese cabbage seed and transplants August through mid-October. September is generally the best month to plant in Louisiana. Transplants also can be planted in January in south Louisiana or February in north Louisiana for an early spring crop. Planting much later than this may cause the plants to bolt before they fully mature because of hot temperatures.

Before planting, apply 1 pound of 13-13-13 fertilizer, or its equivalent for every 25 feet of row. If direct-seeding in the garden, plant seed about 1/4 inch deep, on raised, well-drained beds. Since the seeds are small, a firm seed bed is important. Thin plants to a 10- or 12-inch spacing between plants for pak choi types and 18 inches for Napa types.

If transplanting, be careful not to damage the roots of plants. Transplants are ready to set in the field three weeks from the time the seed are sown. Keep soil moist to speed germination and help set transplants. Sidedress plants about three weeks after planting or if you direct-seeded, and the plant has developed a loose head (Napa types) or is 5-6 inches tall (Bok choy types). Sidedress with about 1 pound of 8-8-8 or 1 cup of calcium nitrate per 25 feet of row.

Harvest

Napa cabbage and Bok choy are generally harvested 50 to 80 days after seeding. Napa cabbage is harvested 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. Bok choy is harvested when the stems begin to swell.

Pests

Chinese cabbage has few serious pests. Maintaining healthy plants by proper irrigation, fertilization and plant spacing will go a long way in reducing pest pressure.

Weeds

Chinese cabbage is generally grown in the fall and early spring garden where winter annuals can be a problem. Black plastic mulch is a very effective means to controlling weeds in large gardens. In addition to providing weed control, the plastic warms the soil and controls moisture. In smaller gardens, organic mulches such as pine straw, leaves and hay are effective materials for weed control.

Two herbicides are approved for use with Chinese cabbage: trifluralin and sethoxydim.

Trifluralin (Treflan, Miracle Gro Weed Preventer) is a herbicide that controls many weeds before they emerge from the soil. It should be applied prior to transplanting Chinese cabbage and incorporated into the top 2 inches of soil. Sethoxydim (Poast, Hi-Yield Grass Killer) controls grasses such as ryegrass it emerges without injuring the cabbage. However, sethoxydim does not control annual bluegrass, a common winter annual grass.

Insects

Beetles and worms, which chew holes in the leaves, can be controlled by using carbaryl as needed. To control worms, you can use *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) sprays also. If aphids are a problem, use horticultural soaps or light horticultural oil applications.

Diseases

The blackleg fungus forms ashen gray spots that have tiny blackened dots on leaves and stems. Stems become girdled, and the plants wither and die. The black rot bacteria blacken the veins and central areas of the stem. Leaves will yellow at the margins and drop. Both diseases are carried on or in the seed and may live in fresh refuse in the soil. Bacterial soft rot can develop in heads nearing maturity. The center of the head turns mushy and usually exhibits a foul odor. To control these diseases, buy clean western-grown seeds, and rotate garden areas growing cole crops from year to year. Spray fixed copper.

Downy mildew produces small yellowish splotches on leaves with a white-to-purple downy growth on the lower surfaces. This fungus can be controlled with chlorothalonil, maneb, Ridomil or fixed copper fungicidal sprays. Apply at first appearance and then every 7-10 days. Wash off residue if you spray within a week of harvest.

Root rot caused by *Phytophthora*, a fungal-like microorganism is very common in water-logged, compacted soils. Symptoms appear as purple discoloration of older leaves and a purple canker on the stem. Severe root rot occurs and diseased plants are easily pulled up from the ground. Good cultural practices such as reducing compaction, improving soil drainage and maintaining adequate soil fertility are critical in managing root rot. Use fungicides containing phosphorus aids as preventative sprays.



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