

Home Gardening Series

Chinese Cabbage

Craig R. Andersen
Associate Professor and
Extension Specialist -
Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained
Fertility – medium to rich
pH – 5.8 to 7.5
Temperature – cool season
Moisture – moist

Culture

Planting – transplant
Spacing – 12-18 x 36 inches
Hardiness – hardy biennial
Fertilizer – medium feeder

Chinese Cabbage –
***Brassica rapa* var.**
chinensis
***Brassica rapa* var.**
pekinesis

Chinese cabbage is indigenous to China, where it has been cultivated for over a thousand years. Its name is quite misleading. Chinese cabbage is more closely related to turnips and rutabagas than cabbages.

Most Chinese brassicas are called Chinese cabbage in the West. There are many kinds of Chinese cabbages. They are grouped by size, shape and whether heading or non-heading. Some of the more common ones are 'Pei Tsai' and 'Tatsoi,' small, loose leaf types. Chinese cabbages are fast-growing vegetables that can be ready for harvest three to four weeks after sowing. Plants of this family have light green leaves with white petioles. Pak Choy has glossy, dark green leaves with long, large white petioles.



Baby Pak Choy has small, loose green leaves and crispy green petioles. Napa, referred to as Bok Choy, is the most popular family of the Chinese cabbages seen in markets in both the West and the Orient. The plant forms a barrel-shaped head with light green leaves and petioles when mature. There are several varieties of semi-heading types referred to as Michihili cabbages. The upright plant is generally wrapped with long leaves forming a long, tapering head while growing up to 2 feet tall.

Chinese cabbage's mild flavor is similar to that of celery and cabbage (although Chinese cabbage is not related to celery), and its leaves are thinner and more delicate than those of cabbage. Like cabbage, Chinese cabbage is prepared and eaten in many different ways. It is cooked as a vegetable, used raw as a salad, used as an ingredient in stir-fries and even fermented and pickled as kimchi.

*Arkansas Is
Our Campus*

Visit our web site at:
<https://www.uaex.uada.edu>

Chinese Cabbage Cultivars -

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Plants Per 100 Feet of Row	Remarks
Napa Type	Blues	57	100	Best for spring and early summer.
	China Pride	64	100	Best for fall planting, slow bolting.
	Orient Express	45	100	Heat tolerant, plant in late spring.
	Optiko	60	100	Widely adapted, bolt tolerant.
Pak Choy Type	Toy Choy	45	100	
	Joi Choy	50	100	White stem, slow to bolt.
	Mei Qing Choy	42	100	Small green petioles, baby pak choy.
Michihili Type	Jade Pagoda	72	100	Best for fall planting, widely adapted.

Cultural Practices

Planting Time

For best head development, it is important not to interrupt growth. Since Chinese cabbage seedlings are more sensitive to transplanting than cabbage seedlings, the plants are best started in individual containers (peat pellets, pots, etc.) for spring planting. Transplant two to three weeks before the last frost-free date and before the plants are too old (four to five weeks). Sowing seed directly in the garden may not allow enough time for the seedlings to grow before warm summer days stimulate seed-stalk formation and bolting, and the plant is useless.

Chinese cabbage develops best during cool weather and is an excellent vegetable for fall gardeners. Start seed in early to midsummer and transplant at the same time as late cabbage.

Spacing and Depth of Planting

Space plants 12 inches apart for upright varieties, such as Michihili, and 15 to 24 inches apart for the larger heading types. For fall planting, transplant or sow seed 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep directly in the garden. Keep the soil moist and thin seedlings with care. If possible, start seed in a protected place and transplant on a cloudy day. Use a starter fertilizer solution when transplanting.

Care

Treat Chinese cabbage as you would cabbage. Maintain sufficient soil moisture to keep the plants growing vigorously, and side-dress with nitrogen fertilizer when the plants are half grown.

Harvesting

Cut the entire plant at ground line when the heads are compact and firm. Harvest before the seedstalks form in early summer and before hard freezing temperatures in the fall.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why does my Chinese cabbage fail to form a good head in the spring? Instead, it sends up an early seedstalk.

A. Chinese cabbage quickly goes to seed (bolts) during warm summer days. Dry weather accelerates the process. For best results, choose early varieties, start plants in individual containers and transplant after the last hard frost in the spring. Late spring-seeded Chinese cabbage will also go to seed.

Q. What is “Chinese cabbage” and how is it different from regular cabbage?

A. Chinese cabbage describes several greens which differ considerably. Like cabbage, they are cool-season crops and bolt or go to seed in the long days of late spring and summer. They grow best as a fall or early winter crop in most areas of Arkansas. Cultural practices are the same as for regular cabbage, although Chinese cabbage matures quicker and may be ready in as few as 60 to 65 days from seeding. Chinese cabbage is used fresh in salads or cooked like regular cabbage.

DR. CRAIG R. ANDERSEN is associate professor and Extension specialist - vegetables, Horticulture Department, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Fayetteville.

Pursuant to 7 CFR § 15.3, the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services (including employment) without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, sexual preference, pregnancy or any other legally protected status, and is an equal opportunity institution.