

Queen of the Cold Months: Kale



My favorite season is officially here. It's a good thing most of my favorite vegetables are frost-hardy, cool season varieties. I recently translated some kale – one of my all-time fav veggies – into my designated winter beds, and they're doing great. The kale trend seems to have come and gone, but I'm not hopping off the bandwagon just yet. Kale is easy to grow and can be incorporated into so many tasty dishes. I also love how many varieties there are. While it's difficult to successfully experiment with other plants in this region of swinging temperatures, I can always count on kale to provide interesting results.

Why kale is the perfect veggie for the

frugal garden

Why is it the one vegetable I must plant each year? The answer is easy.

- **Fast growing.** While not all varieties are equally quick-growing, most variants offer a quick yield.
- **Cold hardy.** It's not vulnerable to cold weather like other plants, which means I can plant it early, and sow seed for a fall and winter harvest. And kale actually gets sweeter when exposed to frost.
- **Easy to grow.** For the most part, kale requires little upkeep. I often find volunteer kale plants popping up around my beds, and even without my looking after them they seem to flourish.
- **Nutritious.** The dark leafy green is packed with nutrients and makes for a healthy addition to meals.
- **Tastes good, too.** Roasted, sautéed, or raw, kale is one of my favorite veggies to add to recipes.
- **Works as an ornamental.** Have you ever taken a close look at your town's landscaping? Some municipalities actually use kale extensively to add color and volume to street side plantings.
- **An inexpensive choice.** It's expensive at the supermarket, but growing it offers generous yields. Kale is a cut-and-come-again crop, so with proper care, it will continue to produce throughout the year. Kale seeds are also reasonably cheap.

My favorite kale varieties

I'm still working my way through all the seed catalogs I receive each year in an attempt to try out each and every kale variety. But here are some of my favorites:

Lacinato – Also known as dinosaur kale, it's a beautiful variety with dark, long leaves. Very frost hardy.

Scarlet – A red-leafed variety that makes it easy to spot cabbage worm. Adds color to the garden.

Red Russian – Features green leaves with purple veins and seems to do very well in my zone 5 garden. Not as susceptible to pest infestations.

☐**Tronchuda** – A Portuguese kale that's perfect for Caldo Verde soup.

Forever the trendiest veggie in my heart

While 2018 has given rise to a fermented food craze, kale still remains one of the most frequently used veggies in my household. Making it taste good isn't very hard, and it's a healthy choice. The vegetable is not without its challenges. The cabbage worm pest is the bane of my existence. It decimates brassicas with a fierce determination. The little green worms eat at a fantastic pace and consume an almost unbelievable volume of greens in a single day. Covering crops has been a useful solution, and picking off the little buggers can prevent a total erasure of crops as long as I'm diligent.

Even when faced with the nasty munching critters, I still choose to grow kale every year. It's indeed a wondrous edible and perfect for adding to fall meals. The biennial plant is capable of living through the winter and growing quite tall. With varieties suitable for all growing regions, kale is a versatile option for any frugal garden.