Harvest of the Month

Brussels Sprouts



Social Science

Predecessors to modern Brussels sprouts were probably cultivated in Ancient Rome. Brussel sprouts as they are now known were grown as early as the 13th century in what is now Belgium. They actually are named after the capital of Belgium–Brussels! During the 16th century, Brussels sprouts enjoyed a popularity in the southern Netherlands that eventually spread throughout the cooler parts of Northern Europe, reaching Britain by the 17th century. It is unclear when Brussels sprouts were introduced to the United States, but French settlers in Louisiana are known to have grown them. Today, the United States is the third top producing country of Brussels sprouts in the world. Mexico is second and the Netherlands is number one. California grows almost all of the Brussels sprouts grown in the United States.

Botany

Brussels sprouts are very closely related to broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower; it all comes down to the part of the plant we eat. With Brussels sprouts we are eating buds that sprout out of the junction of each leaf up the tall stalk of the plant. Each individual sprout looks like a tiny cabbage!

Coles de Bruselas means Brussels sprouts in Spanish.

Culinary Uses

Brussels sprouts can be prepared in a variety of ways. Roasting them is very trendy and brings out their sweetness. They can also be eaten raw like cabbage and are very good when sliced very thinly and tossed into a salad or slaw.





Balsamic Honey-Glazed Skillet Sprouts Recipe

Nutrition

One cup of raw Brussels sprouts offers about 3g of protein, which is a lot for a vegetable! Brussels sprouts are an excellent source of Vitamin K, which is essential for bone health and blood clotting; and Vitamin C, which is critical for keeping our immune system working. The chemical sulforaphane that gives Brussels sprouts their unique flavor also helps lower cancer risks.

Growing Tips

Brussels sprouts are the quintessential cool weather crop, growing best at temperatures between 45 and 75 degrees F. The plants and mature sprouts can even handle light frosts, and the sprouts will taste sweeter if picked after a frost!

Planting

It's important to get the timing of your planting right. Brussels sprouts will take at least 90 days from transplant to harvest (some varieties even longer) so make sure to calculate when you'd like to harvest and count backwards. For a Thanksgiving harvest, that means transplanting the seedlings at the end of August. But you can plant later as well, and harvest throughout the winter.

Care & Maintenance

Adequate water is essential for good growth. Because the weather will still be warm when planting, making sure the soil stays moist will be critical. Regular water and a thick layer of mulch will keep them growing strong until the days shorten and the soil cools. Brussels sprouts are very prone to aphids. Keep a close eye on the plants and catch any infestations early. The plants can handle being sprayed with a hard stream of water regularly to knock the aphids off.

Harvest

Brussels sprouts are axillary buds and mature gradually from the bottom of the stem upwards. They do this because the apical dominance hormone produced by the growing top is only effective for a certain distance. So you will begin harvesting at the bottom of the plant and work your way up as the sprouts get to the size you like (usually about an inch across). Another harvesting technique is to cut off the top of the plant, thus eliminating the apical dominance hormone. All the sprouts will begin growing and size up at around the same time so you can harvest them all at once. This trick is how growers provide the sprouts on the stalk.

