

HORTICULTURE REPORT – MARCH 2022
Kale – Popular Vegetable Once Again

There was a time in the 1950's through 1960's that no self-respecting gardener would exclude kale, a hardy and healthy cool weather crop, from their Summer or Fall garden.

Kale is primarily used in casseroles, soups, or as a stand-alone vegetable. However, a few of the more adventurous can prepare themselves a hardy and satisfying kale salad to include cannelloni beans, onions, and raisins with a dressing of olive oil and vinegar. At least in my home we did.

In our Seacoast time zone six, mid-March is the time to start your indoor seedlings. You can safely plant them in your garden mid-May after a few days of hardening off then harvest the crop in mid-July. Kale requires full to partial sun (six hours daily) and neutral to slightly alkaline soil (pH of approximately 7). Your winter crop should be planted in early to mid-September to be harvested just before the cold sets in around the beginning to mid-November.

Kale like their relative's broccoli and cabbage are prone to the "cabbage worm". There are several ways to remove these kale crop destroying pests who eat kale leaves creating large and small holes. Be proactive – when you notice white butterflies flitting around and landing on your kale plants immediately spray an organic spray or a soap and water mixture. If you see the eggs, scrape them off with your fingers or a cloth. Once the eggs are removed, cover your plants with tulle cloth to prevent moths from using your kale as a home for their offspring in the future.

If small green worms have already appeared, you can pick them off followed by a gentle soap and water spray. Make sure to fully spray the underside of the kale leaf as well. Cover with tulle to prevent any white moths from landing again.

There are many varieties of kale, from curly leafed Red Russian and Tuscan to Portuguese kale with a slightly flatter leaf. They all work in our New England gardens as a tasty and healthful vegetable or simply as a beautiful addition to perennial gardens.

Kale plants need little care, aside from the cabbage worm, and once planted can be harvested in two months. At that point they can be cooked as a side vegetable, eaten raw in a salad, or frozen to be used in soups and casseroles during the winter months. There is nothing better than the aroma of a fresh kale, sausage, and cannelloni bean soup simmering on the back burner of the stove in late Fall.

Happy planting as well as eating this nutritious and once again popular vegetable.

