



**Newton Le Willows
Gardeners' Association**

GROWING BRASSICAS

1. Brassicas include cabbages, cauliflowers, sprouts, kale, broccoli and some root crops including turnips and swedes. Also some less popular yet delicious things like Chinese leaves and pak choi.
2. All brassicas are susceptible to a disease caused by a strange form of fungus, club root. You can identify it by the roots at the base of the stem being very swollen and malformed; the plant dies. Club root and its spores can live quite happily in ground where brassicas have not been grown for many years once they have got there and there is no cure in the form of a chemical that we can use to eradicate it. So if you have club root in your vegetable plot, you won't easily get rid of it. For that reason we should practice crop rotation, which means that brassicas are grown only once in four years in a patch of ground. For this life is easier if your vegetable plot is divided up into four beds, use bed A to grow brassicas in 2017, bed B in 2018, bed C in 2019 and bed C in 2020, then in 2021 back to bed A. Peas and beans, onions, shallots, leeks and garlic, potatoes and other roots and the other three vegetable groupings that you may use in the rotation.
3. Be careful: if you know a neighbour has club root in his or her garden, don't trample dirty boots from there onto your plot; the soil may have the dreaded spores. Be careful where you get your brassicas plants from (our Hut plants have been grown in potting compost and not the ground).
4. Happily (!) club root is not as virile in alkaline pH conditions, and because we are feeding just our own families we are not trying to grow thousands of plants, so we can cosset them more than commercial growers do. So:
 - a) Get the pH of your brassicas bed tested and if it is less than 7.5 treat it with ground limestone.
 - b) Don't sow direct or plant out small cabbages or sprouts etc. Pot them up into plant pots of diameter at least six inches (15cm)...I go bigger...so that when planted out they have a good root system growing in a nice lot of club root-free potting compost.
 - c) When you plant out your brassicas, dig a hold plenty big enough to take the root ball, and scatter two good handfuls of lime, not ground limestone, inside and around the hole.
5. If you find a plant with club root, either burn it or put it in a knotted plastic bag and bin it. Never put diseased material in your compost bin.
6. Another serious problem of cabbages, sprouts, cauliflowers and kale is the cabbage root fly maggot. The fly lays its eggs in the soil close to the plant stem and the tiny maggots eat their way into the stem/root junction, eventually killing the plant. In the Hut we sell barrier discs that are slipped around the stem base of a newly planted brassicas plant (do this carefully without causing damage) and they prevent the female fly laying eggs in the soil next to the stem.
7. Yet another major problem is the cabbage white butterfly and cabbage moth. You could spray. 'Green' alternatives include checking your plants daily and squashing eggs (they can be laid in groups or singly) or caterpillars, or enclosing the plants in a tunnel or frame made from very fine insect mesh (we sell packs...it lasts for years).
8. Another brassicas problem? Whitefly. These minute flies are resistant to insecticides. The same very fine mesh will keep them out.
9. Another problem? Woodpigeons. Shoot them by all means, but more will appear. The use of netting again solves the problem.



10. When planting young brassicas plant, plant them deeper than they were in the pot or ground, and firm them in well.
11. Taller brassicas (sprouts, purple sprouting broccoli and the taller kale) need staking, using a thick 4' cane or wooden stake. Tie firmly to the stake.
12. Leafy brassicas (cabbages, kale, sprouts, broccoli) thrive on high nitrogenous fertilisers. Use Growmore or Fish, Blood and Bone, or dried blood. But note that compounds of nitrogen are highly soluble and are readily washed from the soil. This is a major problem for overwintered brassicas, such a spring cabbage and purple sprouting broccoli and the later pickings of kale. [A Yorkshire pal called Oliver has a garden that adjoins a market garden. In late February a couple of years ago he and the market gardener noted that their spring cabbages were standing still. They had their soil tested: nil nitrogen.] So it pays to give liquid feed to keep them going and an extra good feed to overwintered crops in early spring. Try liquid Growmore or the organic seaweed fertiliser (brown bottle) that we sell at the Hut, or make some comfrey liquid feed (put as much comfrey as you can into a gallon container and fill up with water; leave it to rot down; when ready it stinks; a cup of the foetid juice in a watering can; water it on every fortnight or so).
13. Recommended varieties (note those marked * are club root resistant varieties):
 - a) Spring cabbage: Pixie, Greyhound, Durham early.
 - b) Summer-autumn cabbage: Hispi, Primo, Kilaton*, Kiloazol*.
 - c) Savoy cabbage (the best for winter cropping, v. hardy): Ormskirk, January King, Tundra.
 - d) Red cabbage: Red Flare, Kalibos, Lodero*.
 - e) Purple-sprouting broccoli: Claret, Rudolph, Early Purple.
 - f) Calabrese (green broccoli): Romanesco (Celio) is looks like a yellow-green cauli and is ACE!...see below, Marathon*.
 - g) Brussels sprouts: Crispus (harvest Sept), Montgomery (Nov-Feb), Clodius* (Dec-Feb).
 - h) Cauliflower: Romanesco (Veronica), Clapton*.
 - i) Kale (a great winter crop often ignored...strip the thin leaf from the thicker stalk and veins and steam...great with Sunday lunch): Starbor, Redbor, Nero di Toscana, Dwarf Green Curled.
14. Alan was my oldest gardening friend and he liked rows of plants in precise geometric position, with rows and plants spacing's to the nearest thou' of an inch. He showed me a row of 12 Primo summer cabbage plants, each one identical, and each exactly the same distance from its neighbours. They were fully grown and ready for harvesting. Could you eat cabbage two or three times a week in August? Neither could Alan. He and his wife ate three and gave the rest away. With things like summer cabbages, and turnips, and beetroot, and lettuces, make several sowings through the spring and summer so that you never have a great excess of things you cannot eat. So never have more than three summer cabbages ready for harvest, but have a few that will be ready a week or two after you have eaten the last of the earlier sowing.
15. Don't give good food to those who cannot be bothered to grow it themselves. Give to those who can no long grow their own, or swap with those who do!

Good growing

Malcolm Greenhalgh