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Collards

***Brassica oleracea*, Acephela group is a member of the Brassicaceae (mustard) family. Varieties include Vates, Champion, Georgia, Morris Heading, and Louisiana Sweet.**

The collard is a green leafy vegetable. The dark green leaves are borne in rosettes around an upright, stocky main stem. The long-stemmed leaves resemble cabbage leaves, except that they are oval rather than round. It is a common cooked green in the southern United States.

Market Information

Leaves can be clipped from the plant as long as the weather and the plant's flavor hold up. A good freeze will greatly improve flavor.

Bunch the harvested leaves tightly, tie them, pack them, and hydrocool them. Pack 24 bunches in a 25-pound wirebound or leaf carton. Sell by offering samples of fresh leaves.

Current production and yield. In California, the County Agricultural Commissioners have reported that collard greens were grown commercially in Fresno, San Diego, and Santa Barbara counties.

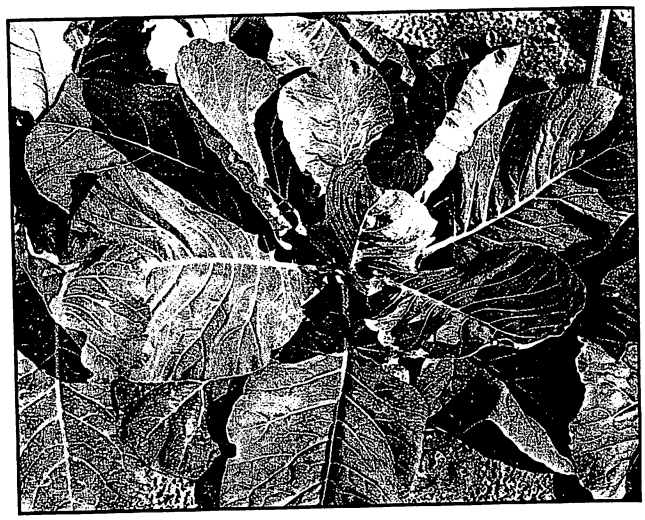
In the United States, collards are available in the market year round, but supplies peak between December and April and decline from June through August. Virginia, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and Alabama are the leading producers of collards.

Use. The plant's nutritious leaves can be boiled or stir-fried as greens. They have a slightly bitter flavor.

Nutrition. Collard greens are high in Vitamin A, with about twice the Vitamin A of broccoli. A 100 g edible serving contains 3,300 IU of Vitamin A, 23 mg of Vitamin C, 1.6 g of protein, and 117 mg of calcium.

Culture

Climatic requirements. Collards thrive over a wide range of growing conditions, but the quality and taste are better and the plant grows best during the cooler months of the year. Along the coast they can be grown all summer. The plants can withstand



Collard leaves grow in a rosette around an upright stem. (Photo: Hunter Johnson)

temperatures as low as 15°F unless such a freeze abruptly follows a warm period of growth. They withstand heat well, and can take more cold than cabbage.

Propagation and care. In commercial plantings, collards are direct-seeded ½ inch deep. Space the rows 24 to 36 inches apart, four seeds per foot, and then thin to one plant every 10 to 12 inches. About 2 to 4 pounds of seed will plant an acre. If you transplant, space the plants 10 inches apart in the rows.

Collards grow very well in well-drained loam soils that are high in organic matter. About 6 to 8 weeks after seeds are planted, collards are ready to harvest. Harvest can continue through several pickings as long as the weather is cool and leaf quality remains good. Thrips, aphids, flea beetles, and cabbage loopers are common pests of collards.

Harvest and postharvest practices. Handle collard greens as you would handle spinach. The USDA storage recommendation is 32°F at 95 to 100% relative humidity to prevent wilting, with an approximate storage life of 10 to 14 days.

Sources

Seed

Asgrow Seed Co., P.O. Box 5038, Salinas, CA 93915

W. Atlee Burpee & Co., 300 Park Avenue, Warminster, PA 18974

Ferry-Morse Seed Co., P.O. Box 4938, Modesto, CA 95352

Harris Moran Seed Co., 3670 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624

Johnny's Selected Seeds, Foss Hill Road, Albion, ME 04910

Le Jardin du Gourmet, P.O. Box 75, St. Johnsbury Center, VT 05863

Nichols Garden and Nursery, 1190 North Pacific Highway, Albany, OR 97321

Park Seed Co., Cokesbury Road, Greenwood, SC 29647–0001

Seeds Blüm, Idaho City Stage, Boise, ID 83706

NOTE: Also, check with your local seed suppliers.

More information

California Agricultural Statistics Service. 1987, 1988. *County Agricultural Commissioner data. 1987 and 1988 annual reports.* California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, CA.

Federal-State Market News Service. 1989. *Los Angeles fresh fruit and vegetable wholesale market prices 1989.* California Department of Food and Agriculture Bureau of Market News and USDA Marketing Service.

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Mansour, N. S. 1990. *Collards.* Vegetable Crops Recommendations. Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR.

The Packer. 1990. *1990 produce availability and merchandising guide.* Vance Publishing Corp., Overland Park, KS.

Stephens, James. *Minor vegetables.* 1988. Cooperative Extension Bulletin SP-40, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

USDA. 1987. *Tropical products transport handbook.* Agric. Handb. 668. USDA, Washington, DC.

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