

Kohlrabi, Stem Turnip

Brassica oleracea of the Gonylodes group is a member of the Brassicaceae (mustard) family. Varieties include White Vienna, White Danube, Green Vienna, Purple Vienna, Purple Danube, Earliest Erfurt, and Grand Duke.

Kohlrabi is a low biennial plant native to northern Europe. Cabbage-like leaves arise on long stems from the top and sides of its round, root-like stem. The stem's enlargement 1 to 3 inches above the ground accounts for kohlrabi's alternate name, "stem turnip." The leaves can grow as long as 10 inches. Two types of kohlrabi are available: one has green skin, the other has red or purple skin. The inner flesh is always white.

Market Information

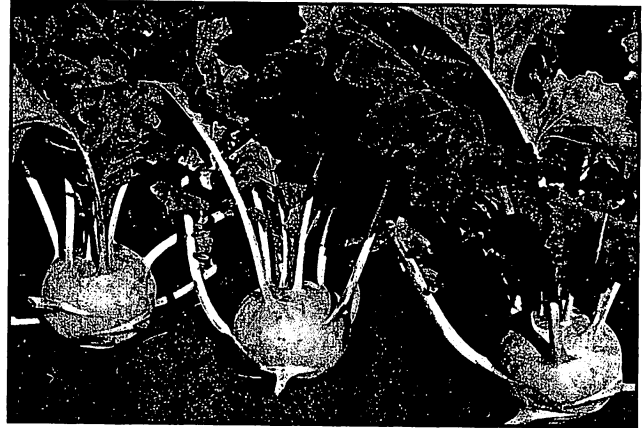
Baby kohlrabi is tender and the greens are good tasting. This crop can be sold as a baby vegetable when it reaches a diameter of 1 to 2½ inches, or as an adult when it's about fist sized. The plant is hard to sell at intermediate sizes. Red or purple varieties are almost unknown as adults in many markets, but their leaves are better to eat than those of green kohlrabi.

Use. Before the kohlrabi stem is eaten, its peel is usually removed and its inner flesh is diced and boiled. Baby kohlrabi is steamed or otherwise cooked whole and served with butter. The greens are also valued at this stage; adult greens are too tough to eat. The swollen stem of a young kohlrabi may also be eaten raw; it is crunchy and can be served in salads or with dips. Cooks use the enlarged stem in essentially the same way as they use turnips. Use it when the tubers are 2 to 3 inches in diameter, before they become hard or bitter. Stress also causes the stems to become fibrous and woody.

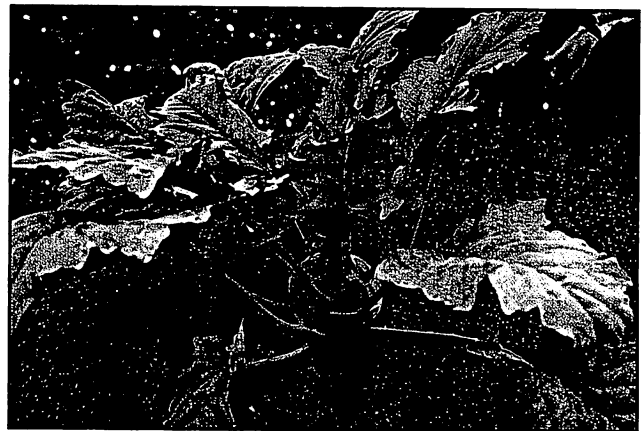
Nutrition. Kohlrabi contains 20 IU of Vitamin A, 43 mg of Vitamin C, 1.7 g of protein, and 33 mg of calcium per 100 grams of raw, edible portion (about a cup).

Culture

Climatic requirements. Common varieties of kohlrabi may sprout unwanted seedstalks if grown for more than a week in cold temperatures of 50°F. The recommended temperature range is 65° to 77°F, with a 72°F optimum temperature. Cold spells with temperatures in the twenties will kill or stunt the plants.



Kohlrabi (white Danube variety shown here) is grown for the enlarged stem. (Photo: Sakata Seed America, Inc.)



Purple Danube kohlrabi. (Photo: Sakata Seed America Inc.)

Propagation and care. Propagation and time of planting are like those for cabbage; otherwise, kohlrabi is grown the same way as turnips. Plant spacing is about every 4 inches in rows 18 to 20 inches apart. Kohlrabi can also be planted with two rows on a 36-by-40-inch bed, one plant every 4 inches. Plant seeds approximately ½ inch deep. Kohlrabi matures in about 60 days when started from seeds, and in 40 days when started from transplants; however, transplanting may hurt development of the stems. Pests are the same as for cabbage.

Harvest and postharvest practices. Harvest the vegetable with clippers. Do not bunch, since that will bruise or break the leaves. Kohlrabi keeps well in transit if not packed too tightly. Kohlrabi is packed in bunches of two to five and placed in layers with the leaves toward the outside of the car-

ton. The USDA storage recommendation is 32°F at 98 to 100% relative humidity, with an approximate storage life of 2 to 3 months for topped kohlrabi. The high humidity prevents shriveling and toughening. Kohlrabi with leaves has a storage life of only 2 weeks at 32°F.

Sources

Seed

NOTE: Kohlrabi seed is widely available.

More information

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