Kale

Nutritional Value:
Eat More Kale, as the saying goes. This is the one brassica that is closest to its wild relative. It also has a host of amazing nutrients and is very good for you. It’s one of the most nutritious vegetables you can grow; rich in vitamins A, C, K, chlorophyll, and several phytonutrients.

Challenges / Advantages:
Kale is relatively easy to grow and once it takes hold and you find a variety that aligns with your local growing conditions it grows like a weed. It does well in warm weather, although it will have less flavor when maturing in mid summer heat. It can also withstand frost and snow without fading. It can survive low temperatures and actually improves in flavor. The cold temperatures stimulate the conversion of starch into sugars. (This also is true of spinach, carrots, and parsnips) Kale will be one of the last veggies still edible under the heavy snows of winter.

Sowing:
Kale can be started indoors for transplanting or direct seeded. Both work. To start indoors, plant seeds 6 weeks before last frost for an early spring planting. It can withstand the rigors of transplanting very well. Transplant the seedlings outside about 2 weeks before last frost when they are about 5” high and have 4 or 5 true leaves. For direct sowing, plant seeds ¼” -1/2” deep at 2” centers to start. As they grow, thin to 12-15” centers.

Soil prep:
Optimal soil pH is 6.0-7.5 but is tolerant of variable soils. If grown in evenly drained soil rich with compost the kale will grow faster and have more tender, better tasting leaves. Amend the soil with at least 2” of organic compost and work into the top 6” of soil before planting.

Growing Conditions:
Kale shines when the temperature doesn’t. It does best in cool climates, but can tolerate the heat, but you can help it along with mulch, and intensive spacing to create shade canopy.

Planting tips:
Kale plants tend to get pretty large, so give them enough space between to accommodate that growth. 12” centers for excellent soil, 15” centers for marginal
soil. You can inter-plant kale with a faster growing lettuce crop that can be harvested before the kale matures and takes over the bed.

**Watering:**
Needs consistent watering. Watch the leaves. The larger ones will start drooping if they need more water. If you have good amounts of organic matter in the soil, the water retention should help keep the soil evenly moist between watering.

**Harvest:**
Kale can be continually harvested for several months. The leaves are cut from the lower and outer growth, leaving the center and high leaves for new growth. Harvest only a few leaves from each plant at any one time to avoid shock and stimulate more growth. You can keep harvesting leaves all the way into winter and in milder climates, right through winter.

**Notes:**
Aphids can be a problem on certain varieties of kale. The best way to deal with them is a strong blast of water to knock them off. Aphids have a hard time finding their way back to the host plant once knocked off. At the end of the season, whenever the kale dies back, be sure to remove entire plant to compost it. Removing it from the bed will help diminish carryover of pests into the next season.

**Cooking:**
Kale is great as a salad on it’s own, or with other vegetables. It is also great sliced and sautéed with garlic and onions or with any stir fried dish. Try it in omelets. Kale is a favorite for the raw food crowd and can be juiced for an incredibly healthy green-drink. Then you can use the pulp in veggie burritos.

**Storage:**
Kale will keep for up to three weeks in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. For freezing, I recommend slicing it up, blanching it in boiling water for three minutes, then cool and freeze in ziplock bags. Then you can thaw as needed in the winter and add to stir fried dishes, soups, omelets, or casseroles.

**Good Varieties:** Toscano, Lacinato, Ripbor, Red Russian, Green Scotch Curly, very hardy (1865)
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