

Brussels Sprout

Introduction: At this club in October 2011 Dick Turvey told us that he believed that growing Brussels Sprouts was an easier way for two people to eat cabbage greens than growing cabbages. He planted seedlings in the first week of October, November and December for succession and claimed “Maxim” was the best variety. My own experience has been that they are at least as easy to grow as cabbages and provide a more continuous yield. We can pick what we need for a meal rather than picking a whole cabbage and a brussels sprout crops over a longer period than a cabbage.

Growing: You can have Brussels Sprouts virtually all year round in Dunedin (apart for the hungry gap between October and December). Plant seedlings as soon as growth starts in the spring (September-October) for the summer and autumn and again in January for winter and early spring. They should be 30cm apart in rows that are 60 cm apart. We grow six plants in Spring and six in January. Like all the cabbage family they grow fastest if you have lots of nitrogen in the soil.

They grow in temperatures of 7 – 24 ° C with highest yields at 15 – 18 ° C and home gardeners have an advantage over commercial growers in that you can harvest them over many weeks and they are not affected by freezing temperatures – some say it even enhances the flavour.

They are part of the cabbage family and so put them in the same plot as Broccoli, cabbage & Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, radish, swede, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, radish and rocket.

They should grow well in Dunedin as they are a commercial crop in Oamaru.

Problems: At first, we had problems with aphids and tried a number of sprays, including rhubarb spray (oxalic acid). Now I just hose the stems with water at high pressure – sometimes twice a week but last season when we had flowering borage nearby the aphids seemed to be less of a problem.

Varieties: We have not tried any other types than “Maxim” and I have not found a source of seeds for this. Many cultivars are available, some being purple in color, such as 'Ruby Crunch' or 'Red Bull'. The purple varieties are hybrids between purple cabbage and regular green Brussels sprouts developed by a Dutch botanist in the 1940s, yielding a variety with some of the red cabbage's purple colors and greater sweetness. To keep the red color you need to squeeze a little lemon juice over them before cooking.

Flower sprouts are relatively new to the market, the result of a cross between brussels sprouts and kale. They are like a tightly furled frilly rosebud and apparently have a mild nutty flavour. We feel they might be more difficult to keep aphid-free and so have not tried them.

History: The name is probably due to them first being popular in northern Europe near Brussels.

Cooking: In his book “How to eat better” James Wong suggests that Brussels Sprouts have the highest amount of glucosinolate– a chemical that suppresses cancer cell development.

Preserve the nutrients by steaming, sautéing or microwaving them.

References:

“How to eat better”, James Wong 2017

How Do Brussels Sprouts Grow? | Maddie Moate YouTube.