

VERITABLE VEGETABLE'S PRODUCE NOTES BROCCOLI RULES (or...let the broccoli sprouts live!)

Lately there has been a lot of talk about the wonder of broccoli sprouts, and their anti-cancer fighting properties. But, if the sprouts are allowed to grow through their natural life cycle these same properties exist ten-fold.

Although broccoli seems abundant year-round, it is naturally a late-fall early-winter crop. A member of the Cruciferae family (or cole crops), wild broccoli and other cabbages



grew on the cold, windswept cliffs of Dover England and were used by nomadic tribes over three thousand years ago. The name broccoli comes from the Latin word *brachium* which means "branch" or "arm"—a likely description for a vegetable with numerous thick, fleshy stalks supporting a head of compact florets. Because of their leaf structure, broccoli and other cole crops can endure cold temperature down to 15 degrees F for short periods of time.

Most broccoli in America is grown in California, available year round, and most abundant from October to May. When a broccoli crop is bound for fall and winter production seeds are sown in mid-summer to allow for adequate growth prior to the onset of fall.

Most broccoli matures in 80-92 days, although the white and purple varieties may take up to 102 days. Broccoli needs to be grown in humus-rich ground with the pH adjusted to 6-7. Often farmers will apply lime in the fall to help neutralize acid soils. Broccoli needs a steady supply of nutrients and a fall fertilization is often applied to ensure good winter growth.

Pests

Prevention in the form of creating a good habitat for the plants and beneficial insects is the best form of pest control. Careful, regular monitoring of the crop aids in the early detection of an infestation and makes control easier. Aphids can be the most troubling of pests on a broccoli field. Beneficial insects such as lacewings and ladybugs feast on aphids. Some farmers have also found that overhead watering as opposed to row watering keeps pests off the plants.

Cancer-fighting properties

In today's health conscious world, broccoli has been proclaimed the number one anticancer vegetable. Broccoli has been linked to lower the risk of colon cancer; contains almost no fat, so is good for the health of your heart; and is rich in calcium (140 mg/cup). It is also rich in carotene; and freshly cooked broccoli tops the scales with 2 1/2 times the RDA for vitamin C.

~P. Echevarria