

# Superfood Kale

by Ray Novitske, Fairfax Master Gardener

You can today buy organic kale powder, kale flakes, fresh kale, full spectrum kale vitamin capsules, pressed spinach kale juice and kale deer feed. This must tell you that in health-conscious circles, kale is a superstar superfood. It is rich in antioxidants, high in fiber and loaded with vitamin C and K - more than spinach. In fact, compared to spinach, kale has more vitamins per serving with 100 percent of B6 and C vitamins, and lasts longer in your refrigerator.



photo: Eva Bronzini, Pexels

Kale is a vegetable that has been around for a long time. It is native to the eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor. Romans and Greeks cultivated and consumed it. Thomas Jefferson planted kale in his Monticello gardens. Until recently, it was used more as a plate garnish than a main food.

Kale (*Brassica oleracea*) is a brassica - a member of the cruciferous family that includes cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and collards. It has the sweetest flavor of all these leafy greens. Gardeners know it as fast-growing, and as a cool weather crop that does not like summer heat. Spring heat causes tougher leaves and a bitter taste. A fall planting produces better success.



photo: University of Wisconsin - Madison

Ornamental kale

To succeed, it needs plentiful moisture, fertile soil and full sun, but can grow in a little shade. Best results are achieved when grown and harvested in early spring or fall, and even early winter. Leafy green vegetables need a good amount of nitrogen, and kale is no exception. To conserve moisture and temper extreme swings in temperature, possible in spring and fall, mulch kale. This is especially important in fall when germinating seeds in August.

Plant kale in well-drained locations to prevent root rot. It can easily be grown in containers and makes great additions for gardeners interested in foodscaping. Select early maturing varieties if planning a fall harvest to enjoy it before winter. Frost actually makes kale sweeter as the plant prepares itself for freezing temperatures. Ornamental kale is an increasingly popular winter landscape plant. Although edible, it is grown mainly for its winter color.

When harvesting kale, it is better to use the larger outer leaves for steaming, soups and stir fry recipes, while saving the smaller tender inner leaves for salads. Harvesting the outer leaves encourages continued growth of the plant. After picking kale, store it immediately in cold because it will wilt quickly.

Because it grows in cooler weather, kale does not have many insect pests. Common problems include cabbage worm and aphids. For the green leaf-eating worms, treat with Bt or hand pick them off. For aphids, spray with insecticidal soap.

There are many different types of kale that you can try from light green, to green, to purple or red. Curly kale is probably the most recognized and most popular type. It has green or blue-green leaves that are slightly curled with a peppery taste. Tuscan or Dinosaur Kale has longer straighter leaves with a bumpy pebbled appearance. It has a deep, less bitter flavor than curly types. Russian Red Kale can be found more at farmers markets and gourmet stores. It has more flat leaves with fringed or ragged edges with a mild sweet flavor.

### **Kale Recipes**

[Baked Kale Chips](#), Allrecipes

[Sauteed Kale](#), Food & Wine

[Wintery Kale Salad](#), Ookie Dough

### **References**

[Kale](#), University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

[Kale Grow It Eat It](#), North Carolina State Extension

[Kale is a Headless Cabbage](#), Paul Thompson, Clemson Cooperative Extension

[Brassica oleracea \(Acephala Group\)](#), Missouri Botanical Garden



*Tuscan kale*

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