

Easy Gardening...Collards

Sam Cotner and Jerry Parsons, Extension Horticulturists
Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Collards tolerate more heat and cold than most other vegetables grown in Texas. They are easy to grow, productive and well suited to either large or small gardens. Collards grow best in cool weather and need as much sunlight as possible. They also need a deep soil that is well drained and well prepared. Collards do not form heads and are grown for their leaves. They are a member of the cabbage family.

Soil Preparation and Fertilization

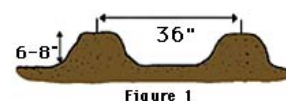
The roots of the collard plant easily reach depths of 2 feet or more. Dig the soil as deep as possible -- at least 10 inches. This loosens the soil so small feeder roots can grow more easily.

If the soil is mostly clay or light sand, add organic matter. A 3 inch layer of compost is adequate. Spread it over the planting area before digging.

Clear the soil of rocks and large sticks. Turn it to cover the plant material on the soil surface. Do this before planting to allow time for the material to begin rotting.

Just before planing, scatter a complete garden fertilizer such as 10-20-10 over the planting area. Use 2 or 3 pounds for each 100 square feet or about 1 cup for each 10 feet of row. Use a rake to mix the fertilizer 3 to 4 inches into the soil.

Work the soil into ridges 6 to 8 inches high and at least 36 inches apart. This brings the fertilizer under the row where the plants can reach it easily. The ridges also allow water to drain away from the plant roots (see Figure 1).



Planting

Collards can be started from transplants or from seed sown directly in the garden. Transplants usually are used for the spring crop. They add 4 to 5 weeks to the growing season since they can be grown indoors before the weather is warm enough to plant seeds outside. Collard seeds sprout when the soil temperature reaches 45 degrees F.

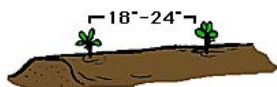


Figure 2

Plant the transplants into the garden as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring -- February or March in most of Texas. Set the plants in the soil about the same depth as they are grown indoors. Space them 18 to 24 inches apart in the row (see Figure 2). Be sure to water the plants after transplanting.

When planting seed, make a shallow furrow about 1/2 inch deep down the center of the bed. Scatter the seed lightly in the furrow. With a little practice the seed can be scattered easily by tapping the edge of the open seed packet lightly with your fingers. One teaspoon of seed plants about 30 feet of row. Cover the seed about 1/4 inch with loose soil or compost. Then sprinkle with water. The plants should come up in 6 to 12 days. However, the colder the soil, the slower the seeds will sprout.

Varieties

- Blue Max
- Georgia LS
- Georgia Southern
- Vates

After Planting

Keep the garden free of weeds. Pull the weeds or hoe them carefully to prevent damage to the collard plant's roots.

After the plants have sprouted, let them grow until they get about 4 to 6 inches tall or become crowded in the row. Then thin the plants gradually until about 18 inches remain between them. The young plants can be either transplanted to another spot or used as greens (see Figure 3). Crowding causes the leaves to be smaller and less green.






Figure 3

Water the plants well each week if it does not rain. When the plants are thinned to their final spacing or if they become pale green in color, add a little more fertilizer. Collards need plenty of nitrogen to develop their dark green leaf color. Scatter 1 cup of garden fertilizer beside the plants for each 30 feet of row (about 1 tablespoon per plant). This is called sidedressing. Mix the fertilizer lightly with the soil and then water. The plants may need to be side-dressed again in 4 to 6 weeks if they become pale and there is no sign the change was caused by insects.

For a fall crop, plant seeds in the garden about 80 days before frost -- August or September in most areas. Seed them heavy and then thin.

Insects

Name and Description		Control
 Aphid	1/8 inch long; softbodied; green, pink, red or brown; usually found on underside of leaf; sucks juices; often called "plant lice".	Diazinon
 Cabbage Looper	inchworm that feed on foliage; light green, white or pale yellow; has three pairs of prolegs.	Bacillus thuringiensis (Dipel, Thuricide, Biotrol)
 Harlequin Bug	up to 3/8 inch long; sucks plant juices, causing plant to wilt and leaves to turn brown; black with red or yellow markings.	Sevin

Before using a pesticide, read the label. Always follow cautions, warnings and directions.

Diseases

Collards are subject to some diseases. If the plants have spots on the leaves, you may need to use a fungicide. Ask your county Extension agent what to use.

Harvesting

Collards can be harvested two different ways. For small plants that need thinning, cut the entire plant about 4 inches above the ground (see Figure 4). Sometimes they sprout back from the side of the stem. Usually, only the lower leaves of collards are harvested. This allows the plant to keep growing and producing more leaves. In mild regions, such as South Texas and coastal areas, collards continue to produce all winter. Collards can stand temperatures of 20 degrees F or less in some cases. They taste sweeter after a light frost.



Figure 4. Cut small plants at ground level or remove lower leaves as plant grows.

Serving

Collards are one of the most nutritious vegetables. They are high in protein, vitamins and minerals and low in calories. To prevent loss of nutrients, do not cook collards in too much water. Ask your county Extension agent for more information on cooking and serving collards.

Hypertext markup by Tammy Kohlleppele, Gretchen Eagle and Dan Lineberger. <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/easygardening/collards/collards.html>