

# GROWING BRUSSEL SPROUTS

*Over the years, Brussels sprouts have been carefully selected, and the flavour is significantly improved from the over-boiled, bitter, mushy orbs that were the norm a few decades ago. There are green and purple varieties, as well as crosses with kale, producing open, leafy sprouts. They taste sweeter after a frost and are packed with antioxidants, fiber, and vitamins.*

## Seed Sowing

Sow in late winter or early spring to harvest between November and January. It's best to grow them in deep modules to prevent clubroot and slug damage. They don't tolerate root disturbance, so handle them gently when transplanting. Direct sowing in a seed bed for later transplanting or sowing 3 seeds 60cm apart in rows 30cm apart is recommended. Thin out to 1 plant per station once true leaves form.

## Transplanting

Transplant your seedlings into their final growing position in full sun around 6 weeks after sowing. Ensure the area is weed-free, add plenty of organic matter before planting, firm the ground well, and protect from frost. Plant in rows 60 cm apart and 30 cm apart within the row.

## Plant Care

Keep them consistently watered, especially in hot and dry conditions, as this helps prevent bolting. Mulching with straw can help retain water and prevent weed growth. For taller plants in windier sites, use a cane support to avoid root rock. You can also mound earth up around the base of the stem for added stability.

## Challenges

Protect the plants from slugs, snails, pigeons, and caterpillars. Copper collars can deter cabbage root fly. Clubroot is a disease affecting brassicas, causing root deformation and stunted growth. If your soil contains clubroot-causing organisms, improve

drainage and add lime to reduce infection, or consider growing in pots.

## Harvest

Harvest when the heads are still compact, picking a few sprouts from the bottom of each plant. Remove any larger leaves from the lower stem during harvesting. You don't have to pick all at once; alternatively, cut the entire stem, stand it in water, and pick as needed for about a week. After harvesting all the sprouts, you can use the tops like spring greens.

## Culinary Ideas

Brussels sprouts are not just for Christmas. They are tiny cabbages and can be used similarly. A special dish is sautéed with chestnuts and bacon. Brussels sprouts are a good source of vitamins A, C, B6, iron, magnesium, calcium, and fiber.

## Seed Saving

Brussels sprouts belong to the species *Brassica oleracea*. Isolate from all other flowering plants of other varieties within this species to prevent cross-pollination. They are a biennial seed crop and need a period of cold to produce seeds. Choose specimens that are true-to-type, healthy, and have shown disease resistance, avoiding early bolters. Grow them in a block of at least twelve. Allow plants to flower and get pollinated; when the green seed pods turn brown and the seeds inside black, cut the stem and leave to mature further on a sheet indoors. When fully dry, the seeds easily fall out of their pods. You can stomp or stand on the material to aid this, then sieve to remove the chaff.