

Explore the best broccoli varieties for North Florida

There is no greater enjoyment than harvesting and eating food that you have grown. Thankfully, here in north Florida, we have two gardening seasons, so if the warm season garden is a little too intense for you, just wait for winter.

While the winter garden may not have tomatoes, it does have peas, kale, and broccoli!

Like all gardeners, I pore over seed catalogs dreaming about growing all the amazing vegetable varieties they offer. Every season I order at least one different variety of each type of vegetable I plan to grow in my garden. Here are some broccoli recommendations for our area.

When I first began vegetable gardening, I thought there was only one type of broccoli to grow, the main head variety. Varieties of this type will produce one main head, and after this is harvested you may or may not have smaller shoots from which can also be harvested. The issue with this type is that you will watch your plants form heads for what feels like forever.

Then the heads are finally ready to harvest, all of them... all at once. It's literally feast or famine.
De Cicco: Di Cicco is an early producer of slightly smaller heads of broccoli, as well as a good production of side shoots after the main harvest. The flavor is good, and the heads are slightly slower to bolt, so you don't need to harvest the minute they look ready.

Waltham 29: Waltham 29 features large heads and excellent flavor. The downside to this variety is that it takes a long time to mature and once the main head is harvested, I usually don't get much side shoot development.

Calabrese: Of the main head types of broccoli, I prefer the Calabrese. It matures sometime between DeCicco and Waltham 29, is reasonably heat tolerant, produces a moderate amount of side shoots after main head harvest, and the flavor is very good.

If you are looking for a steady supply of broccoli all season long, then sprouting broccoli will be your preferred type.

Varieties of this type are supposed to form a smaller main head and then put out numerous side shoots. Perhaps due to the southern climate, I find that I only get the shoots. While these side shoots are bite sized, their production is prolific. The shoots have long stalks which are just as tasty as the floret, so be sure to harvest the entire stalk, not just the top.

Apollo: Apollo has excellent flavor, is very productive, and has great heat tolerance. This is my "go to" variety because I know that I'll have great tasting broccoli all winter long.

Santee: Santee has good flavor, good productivity, and an interesting purple coloring. The downside to Santee is that you need cold temperatures to sweeten the flavor. Here in north Florida, our unpredictable winter temperature fluctuations often heat up enough to cause bitter tasting broccoli.

Peracibaba: In my garden, this variety has not shown good heat tolerance, and bolts very quickly. However, broccoli flowers are a great nectar source for pollinators. Since nectar sources are typically scarce this time of year, I plant a large section of Peracibaba just to help out my neighborhood bees. Finally, we will discuss my favorite type broccoli, Romanesco.

The apple green color and unusual geometric configuration of the florets make this broccoli beautiful to look at, as well as tasty. This type of broccoli will only form a main head with no side shoot production. Romanesco: Romanesco broccoli has moderate germination at best, the growth rate is slow, and the heads are small. But it makes up for all of this the first time you serve it steamed with butter for dinner. It is the lobster of vegetables.

There are so many reasons to grow your own food. Vegetables fresh from the garden can taste better, cost less, have high nutrition content if eaten soon after harvest, and are fun to grow. I already have my seed catalogs out, and this year I'll try growing the raab type of broccoli.

I'm thinking of ordering the Rapini variety, or maybe Spigariello Liscia.

Jennifer Magavero has a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from the University of Florida. For gardening questions, email us at AskAMasterGardener@ifas.ufl.edu

Copyright © 2016 Tallahassee Democrat. All rights reserved. Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights, updated March 2007.
10/14/2016