



CURLY OR SCOTS, SIBERIAN OR TUSCAN? FALL IS TIME TO PLANT THIS SUPERFOOD

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Unfortunately, bugs ate my kale last fall — and my cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and collards — all members of the brassica family. The

**See KALE, Page 2C**Janis Piotrowski

UF/LEON COUNTY EXTENSION**Siberian kale is very tender and mild.**

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### Kale

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leaves of most brassicas are almost interchangeable, including the leaves of those that flower, such as broccoli and cauliflower, or those that form heads, such as cabbage and Brussels sprouts. They can all be used in much the same way as collards or cabbage, but kale is the most mild and tender of all, and requires less cooking.

A mild winter did little to reduce the insect population that a good early cold snap would do. I'm not going to let that discourage me, and kale will be high on the agenda for my fall garden this year.

There are basically two kinds of kale — Scots kale or curly kale (*brassica oleracea*), which is most closely related to collards and broccoli, and *brassica napus*, which includes Tuscan or dinosaur kale, as well as many varieties of what is known as Russian or Siberian kale, most closely related to rutabagas.

*Brassica napus* also includes rape or rape kale. Several varieties of rape are grown for the seeds which produce canola oil.

What we see in grocery stores is most often the curly type. Some stores stock the darker Tuscan kale. Lacinato is an heirloom variety of this type of kale. My preference

is Siberian kale, which I grow in my own garden. This type of kale is more tender and mild than the curly or Tuscan varieties.

All kale is edible either raw or cooked, and is on most lists of superfoods, rich in iron, calcium, magnesium, and vitamins A, C and K, as well as an excellent source of fiber. Ornamental varieties have been developed by horticulturists for their interesting colors and leaf variations. They are also edible, but are usually more tough and bitter than other kales.

Kale is cold hardy to below 20 degrees and can be planted from late September to February. I prefer to plant in the fall as it is harder to grow in spring when heat and bugs take their toll. Also, like most hardy greens, it tastes the best after a frost.

Plant kale from seed or seedlings in sun or part shade. It is not particular and will grow in a wide variety of soils.

When planting you can add organic fertilizer, or nitrogen-rich amendments such as blood meal, cottonseed meal, or composted manure.

Plant seedlings or thin seeds to 12 inches apart and water regularly.

Mulch with oak leaves or pine straw after the seedlings are about six inches high to regulate moisture and soil temperature and to keep dirt and soil organisms from splashing on the leaves.

The plants will grow larger with plenty of sun and plenty of room, but smaller leaves are more tender. Side dress with compost or organic fertilizer every six to eight weeks.

When the plants reach about 10 inches high, you can begin to harvest leaves as needed starting from the bottom of the plant, leaving at least four leaves at the top. If harvesting the whole plant, cut about two inches above the soil and the stub will begin to grow new leaves.

Remove any leaves which begin to turn brown or show signs of disease. Kale has a very long growing and harvesting season. One year when the weather was just right, my Siberian kale plants produced from one fall to the next.

Kale is suitable for growing in pots in partial shade, alone, or with other plants. Winter greens are also good candidates for row covers. There's no worry about blocking pollinators, and the shade protects young tender plants from the sun early in the season. They also keep the moths, which produce cabbage worms, and other nibblers from laying their eggs on your plants.

The covers can be removed when the weather cools. I used row covers last fall, but probably removed them too early.

My bug-eaten brassicas were a learning experience. After removing most of them, I left one pitiful cabbage, as other plants around it didn't seem to be suffering from bug damage. I figured it was acting as a trap plant. The cabbage was fading fast, so I decided to sink a small bowl into the ground up to its rim and added some beer. Then there was nothing to do but finish off the bottle and wait for the bugs to show up at the party. The next day I had a wide variety a little chewing pests drowned in the bowl including many tiny grubs, a couple of earwigs, and a number of tiny little sundial-type snails. When I cut open the cabbage more of the same little chewers were inside. You can bet I will be inviting my garden pests out for a drink again this fall before they get a good taste of the green banquet I have planted for them.

The simplest use of kale is in smoothies. Just wash, remove tough center spines, and add to fruit or other ingredients of your choice.

Kale chips are also easy. Stem kale and cut or tear in two inch pieces. Toss with olive oil and salt. Bake at 375 about 10 minutes.

I'm happy to share two of my favorite kale recipes. Both are simple, quick, and delicious. I've been known to choose the kale salad as a snack over other options such as ice cream.

*Janis Piotrowski is a Master Gardener volunteer with the UF/IFAS Leon County Extension. She hosts blogs about gardening and sustainable living in North Florida at [www.northfloridavegheadz.blogspot.com](http://www.northfloridavegheadz.blogspot.com) and [www.northfloridapermaculture.blogspot.com](http://www.northfloridapermaculture.blogspot.com). For gardening questions, email us at [AskAMasterGardener@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:AskAMasterGardener@ifas.ufl.edu)*

**Kale planter: Lacinato kale in background, curly kale bottom at left**





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**Kale salad with apples, apricots and pumpkin seeds.**

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