

The Brassica Bonanza - Why May is the Prime time for cool seasons crops.

By Kirsten Crombie

If you've ever tried to grow broccoli in summer, you'll know brassicas and hot weather don't mix. That's why May, with its cooler nights and mild days, is prime planting time for these hardy, nutrient-packed vegetables.

Brassica basics

Brassicas—also known as cruciferous vegetables—include favourites like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, and wombok, as well as fast-growing greens like mizuna and mustard. They are cold-tolerant, thrive in full sun, and love rich, well-drained soil. May planting gives them a long runway through winter to form tight heads, crunchy stems, and flavourful leaves.

Timing is everything

One of the most common mistakes with brassicas is sowing too late. These crops take time—Brussels sprouts, for instance, can take up to six months to mature, and I've been known to plant them in late summer in cooler years. Get them in the ground now and you'll be harvesting through late winter and early spring. For quicker returns, choose varieties like pak choi or turnips, which can be ready in six to eight weeks.

Instead of planting a big batch of one variety, consider sowing small amounts of several types—broccoli and wombok here, a row of kale and turnips there. This spreads out your harvest, makes the most of your garden space, and builds resilience against pests and disease.

It's also wise to rotate brassicas with legumes or leafy greens each season. Continuous planting in the same spot can lead to nutrient depletion and increased risk of disease.

Feed the soil, not just the plant

Brassicas are heavy feeders. Before planting, enrich your beds with compost and a sprinkle of well-rotted manure or organic fertiliser high in nitrogen. If your soil is acidic, add a dusting of garden lime—brassicas prefer a slightly alkaline pH and are less prone to pathogens like clubroot when soil conditions are right.

Watch for white butterflies

Cabbage white butterflies are a common sight in winter, and while they look harmless, their caterpillars can decimate young brassica leaves. Netting your crops is the most effective defence. You can also try companion planting with dill, calendula, or nasturtiums to confuse the butterflies and attract beneficial insects. Regular inspections and squashing of eggs on the undersides of leaves can also help keep infestations in check.

A cold-weather staple

Brassicas are productive powerhouses of nutrition, rich in vitamin C, fibre, and cancer-fighting compounds. Whether you're roasting cabbages or cauliflower florets, stir-frying pak choi, or tucking into creamy mash made from turnips and potato, these vegies earn their place on every winter plate.

So, if your garden is looking a little bare, May is the time to get your brassica bed prepped and planted. Future you—and your dinner table—will be glad you did.