

# How to grow cauliflower

## Cauliflower

Family: Brassicaceae (Mustard)  
Season: Cool  
Ease of growing: Difficult  
Nutrient needs: High  
Water needs: High  
Common propagation: Transplant

## Seed facts

Germination temperature: 45°F to 85°F  
Germination time: 5 to 10 days  
Viability: 5 to 10 years  
Direct sow: Midsummer for fall harvest

## Transplants

Weeks to grow transplants: 4 to 5  
Start: Early March through June  
Plant out: April through July

## Planning facts

Typical spacings: 18" x 24" or 18" x 36"  
Square foot per plant: 2  
Time to harvest: 45 to 75 days from transplant

## Variety selection

Cauliflower varieties come in multiple colors including white, purple, green and orange. For white cauliflower, varieties such as Fremont are available that are not as dependent on blanching (see "Care") to get good white color and quality. For an interesting visual addition to your garden, try Romanesco varieties which are green and form a spiraled head with a pointed tip.

## Preparation and planting

Since cauliflower doesn't like hot weather, it's best to sow cauliflower seed in early June

or transplant by mid-July for a fall harvest. Early maturing varieties are generally transplanted to the garden in early spring before the summer temperatures arrive. Prolonged heat or stress from lack of water can cause the plant to bolt, or flower and produce seeds. Cauliflower does best on moist, well drained soils with high organic matter levels.

## Care

The cultural requirements are similar to those of broccoli, but cauliflower is more difficult to grow successfully due to greater sensitivity to environmental stresses. Hot weather may cause buttoning, or failure of developing heads to enlarge. Too cool of weather tends to produce a loose, "ricey" head rather than a compact curd. It is perfectly edible, just not as attractive.

Cauliflower needs a consistent supply of moisture and is a heavy feeder. To get white curds on many varieties, it is necessary to tie up the leaves around the developing curd. This process is called "blanching" and prevents sunlight from stimulating production of green chlorophyll in curds. You can still eat the heads if they were exposed to sunlight, but the curd will develop a greenish brownish color and flavor will be impaired. Blanch cauliflower while the curd is dry as this will help avoid disease problems. In warm weather, the head will ripen in a few days, so check it regularly.

## Harvest and storage

Harvest dates vary with the weather. Warm temperatures make the heads ready only a few days after blanching. In cooler weather, it may take up to two weeks for heads to reach harvest size. Complete harvesting before the first frost for best results as cold temperatures will discolor the heads. Cool the cauliflower immediately to 32°F to 40°F and store for up to three weeks.

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