

Growing Cabbages in the Top End

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SOWING SEASON

Cabbages are a cool climate crop and their planting in the Top End is restricted from the end of March through to July.

SOIL PREPARATION

The soil should be deeply dug and worked to a fine even texture. The bed should be limed with dolomite at the rate of 100-200 g/m² before digging commences. Cabbages are heavy feeders and will benefit from any compost or well rotted animal manure that can be incorporated in the soil at the rate of one or two buckets to the square metre.



FERTILISER

A high analysis fertiliser mix, especially high in phosphorus (e.g. 14% nitrogen, 14% phosphorus and 12% potassium) should be applied at the rate of 70 g/m² along the beds and lightly worked into the top 2 cm of soil. The bed should then be watered and left for a week or so before planting.

Side dress the plants at three weeks and again when the cabbages begin hearting. Side dressing should be done with a 50:50 mix of urea and muriate of potash at a rate of 20 g/m². Avoid contact with the leaves and water immediately.

Molybdenum deficiency is a problem with cabbages in the Top End. To overcome this problem, plants should be sprayed with sodium molybdate at the rate of 1 g/L plus a suitable wetting agent a week after planting out.

Boron deficiency can also be a problem. As a precaution borax at 1-3 g/L should be sprayed one week after planting. However, this must be sprayed separately as it is not compatible with other chemicals.

Alternatively, Solubor® can be used at the rate of 0.5-1.5 g/L. It is compatible with sodium molybdate so they can be mixed and sprayed together. These must also be mixed with a suitable wetting agent to be effective.

PLANTING

Cabbages are usually raised in seed beds, cell trays, jiffy pots, etc and transplanted when they are 5-10 cm high. A weekly application of one of the soluble fertilisers on the market is necessary for good seedling growth. Seedlings should be hardened off by restricting water and increasing direct sunlight exposure by degrees for a week or so prior to planting out.



Seedlings should be well watered prior to transplanting, which should take place on a cool, overcast day or during the late afternoon. Plant out into beds three rows wide with 30-50 cm between plants and rows. Plant to the depth of the first pair of leaves and firm the soil around the seedling. Immediately after planting the cabbages, irrigate.

WATERING

Cabbages require large amounts of water and until seedlings become established regular light watering is necessary. From the beginning of heading onwards the plant's moisture requirements are highest and soil moisture must be maintained. Daily irrigation is generally necessary in our Top End soils. Irrigation can be done by drip, furrow, or overhead sprinkler; the latter is the preferred method.

MANAGEMENT

By planting cabbages in beds of three or four rows with the recommended spacing they soon smother out weeds, although some weeding is necessary till the plants are large enough. Successive plantings at 3-4 week intervals will ensure a continuous supply of cabbages.

INSECT CONTROL

Caterpillars and aphids are the main pests of cabbages.

For information on insect control, please refer to the DPIFM Entomology website at <http://pestinfo.nt.gov.au/>

DISEASE CONTROL

Damping off is caused by a soil borne fungus (*Rhizoctonia solani*), especially in seed beds. As a precaution seed beds should be sterilised or the seed dusted with a suitable fungicide.

HARVESTING

The smaller headed varieties may be ready for picking in about eight weeks from transplanting. Larger varieties can take 12 weeks. Cabbages are ready for harvest when the heads are firm and before the top leaves begin to crack. During warm weather cabbages do not form tight hearts and should be used while they are young.

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