

## Growing Broccoli Around Alice Springs

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Broccoli is a very rewarding vegetable for the home gardener to grow. It is quicker and easier to grow than cabbages or cauliflower and can give successive picks over a long period of time.

### VARIETIES

Hybrid varieties give the best yields. They have a central head, but give side shoots after the central head is cut. For current varieties contact local nurseries.

### SOWING SEASON

Broccoli is a cool season crop, but can be planted early (in December or January) so that it matures as the weather cools. Planting can continue until March or April. Quick maturing types can be sown in the home garden up to August.

### SOIL PREPARATION

Dig the soil as deep as possible, mixing in compost or animal manure. The bed should be raked to level it and then firmed down. It should be watered to about 50 mm (50 L/m<sup>2</sup>) before sowing seed or transplanting.



### FERTILISER

Although there are many different types of fertilisers in the market, a complete granular NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) fertiliser is recommended. The fertiliser should be applied at sowing time, either broadcast and dug in lightly, or preferably put in bands 5 cm deep and to one side (or both sides) of the potential plants.

Areas that have been used for vegetable production for many years may need potash.

In addition, three side-dressings of urea should be applied during the growing season in rings around each plant or in a row alongside of plants.

Avoid putting fertiliser, other than foliar fertiliser, on the leaves. **Always follow manufacturer's recommendations when applying fertilisers.**

### PLANTING

Seed can be sown directly in clumps 50 to 70 cm apart and thinned to one vigorous seedling per planting position. However seed is more often sown in seed-beds, seedling trays, cell-trays, peat pellets, or individual

pots. As only four or five plants are usually planted at once in the home garden, individual pots or peat pellets are ideal. Seed should be sown 0.5 to 1 cm deep.

Seedlings can be planted out when 5 to 10 cm tall. They should be hardened-off by exposing them to more sunlight and restricting water to them over about seven days. Do not let seedlings get so dry that they wilt. Seedlings should be well watered a couple of hours before planting out. They should also be covered for a few days after planting to shade them when the weather is hot.

## **WATERING**

Hand watering daily with a watering-can is ideal for the first few days after planting. All types of watering are suitable for broccoli. Drip irrigation can save water if it is managed properly.

Water demand will vary from about 20 mm (20 L/m<sup>2</sup>) every second day for young plants in hot weather, to 8 mm (8 L/m<sup>2</sup>) every second day for young plants in late autumn or winter, to 70 to 75 mm (70 to 75 L/m<sup>2</sup>) every seven days for mature plants in summer. Broccoli has a moderate salt tolerance (higher than cabbage or cauliflower) and can be irrigated with water containing over 1000 mg/L total dissolved solids (TDS). Avoid leaf wetting during day time when using water containing over 500 mg/L TDS.

## **MANAGEMENT**

The first head can grow up to 20 cm across. Heads should be picked when they are tightly bunched, but before individual flowers open. A slanting cut should be made, taking about 10 cm of stalk below the head. Side shoots will develop and they can be cut as required, before they start to flower. Each time take about 10 cm of stem when cutting.

## **INSECT CONTROL**

The use of pesticides is restricted. Check with the Entomology Section of DPIFM for appropriate chemical control, or refer to [www.pestinfo.nt.gov.au](http://www.pestinfo.nt.gov.au).

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