

Canadians need to learn to eat more cabbage and less asparagus flown in from foreign parts.

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, this is only a reminder of some of the ways we can keep food grown in the summer through our long Canadian winter. There are only a few homesteaders who can achieve the ideal, but we can all go some of the way towards it. In my opinion, the ideal order of priority for winter storage is, first, food you have grown yourself on your own property or community garden; second, food from your local farmer's market grown by someone you trust; and lastly, food from the supermarket marked organic.

Robin Guard is now an urban gardener, but in his farming days he had a fine root cellar in the basement of his 1850 farmhouse, and learned the hard way that there is more to it than piling all the crops in and hoping for the best.

Photo credits: Jenn Greenberg

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DAVID GREENBERG'S RECIPE FOR KIMCHI

Long before I'd heard the term 'lactofermentation,'

I got my first taste of kimchi while eating lunch in a neighbourhood of Chicago known as "Korea town." Whole Napa cabbage leaves were presented to each table on a wooden board. Once the diners nodded their heads in approval, the food server would snip the leaves into thin strips with scissors. This memorable presentation was nothing compared to the hot and tangy delight that my first taste gave me. I've been hooked on spicy ferments ever since. If you like spicy sour food and have not tried authentic kimchi, you are in for a treat.

The following is a close approximation of a traditional Korean kimchi. The amounts given are very flexible. I've tasted wonderful kimchi made with just about every fall vegetable imaginable in various combinations. Leeks, turnips, Savoy cabbage, radishes and even overgrown salad greens can be used. One thing to watch out for is using too many carrots. They are high enough in sugar to make the ferment go alcoholic if there are too many of them. Oh, and beets just taste strange when fermented. If you like fermented beets, go ahead and enjoy your kvass (a Russian fermented beet drink), but please leave the beets out of the kimchi.

Here is the recipe I use:

Four medium heads of Napa cabbage. If there are lots of caterpillar 'tracks,' wash each leaf carefully.



David at work in the kitchen.

One pound carrots, grated
One bunch green onions, chopped

Lots of garlic, at least one medium head, chopped fine

Cilantro and/or parsley, to taste, chopped

Hot peppers. Fresh, dried powdered or paste are all acceptable. The fermentation process seems to mellow their heat. I add enough pepper to make it very hot so it is just right by the middle of winter when my kimchi consumption peaks. However, kimchi is still delicious even if it contains no hot peppers at all.

Coarse natural sea salt. To taste, but please put in enough so it tastes at least a little salty. If you don't, the fermentation won't work. If you get into making ferments in a big way, you will come

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KALE IS COOL

By David Greenberg

Ten years ago, mixed salad greens were the hot new thing at farmers' markets and high-end restaurants. When invited to a potluck dinner, a big bowl of my farm's signature baby salad mix was a sure winner.

Kale, on the other hand, was....well, not so popular. Except with hard-core health food enthusiasts, kale was greatly under-appreciated.

This is changing. Kale has a lot going for it, especially for people who want to eat locally-grown, seasonal produce. It is the most cold-hardy green vegetable around, capable of holding up well in the field through December in Nova Scotia. In a year with a good snow cover to insulate it, I have harvested beautiful kale in late January. In an unheated hoop house, leaves of kale can be harvested right through the winter.

Planting

I plant a small amount of kale early in the spring for the few customers who want it even when other spring greens are available. For the fall and winter crop, which accounts for the bulk of my sales, I start seedlings July 1st for early August transplanting. The seedlings are started in a lightly shaded outdoor location. I like to use soil blocks because they make such nice seedlings.

Ideally, I transplant seedlings that are four to six weeks old. If you grow garlic in deep mulch, you can transplant the kale into the garlic beds right after the garlic is harvested. I just re-distribute the mulch and add a bit more compost or other fertilizer before I transplant the kale. The timing fits just right and kale grows especially well following the garlic. When planting into deep mulch, I space the plants a foot (30 cm) apart in all directions.

If the flower buds are picked before they open, they taste like the sweetest, most tender broccoli imaginable.

When planting in open ground, I set out rows two feet (60 cm) apart with a seedling transplanted every 10 inches (25 cm). The crop is cultivated with a wheel hoe in the paths and with a hand hoe in the row. The first cultivation should be done ten to fourteen days after planting. Cultivate once more before the plants

form a canopy. If there is plenty of water and high fertility, the crop should be dense enough to choke out most weeds after the two cultivations. The few weeds that survive can be pulled by hand.

Sales pick up around Thanksgiving and strengthen as other greens become more difficult to find at farmers' markets. I find that kale really comes into its own in terms of flavour and market demand in late November and through the holidays.

Harvesting

Pick the bottom leaves first, before they have a chance to turn yellow. This will have the added benefit of making your heavily picked over kale patch look like a miniature palm tree plantation! I bunch kale with a #32 rubber band wrapped twice around the stalks. When harvesting for a CSA, I simply break the stalks off of the plant and bunch them just like that. If I want a neater appearance for sales to a store or at a farmers' market, I cut the stalks with a knife on a table in the packing room. I think this is much faster than cutting each leaf off the stalk.

Overwintering

In the spring, a wonderful bonus comes along. The kale plants that survive the winter send up delicious flower stalks and new leaves. If the flower buds are picked before they open, they taste like the sweetest, most tender broccoli imaginable. To increase the percentage of plants that survive the winter, you can mulch the plants with leaves, straw or hay. I have not tried it myself, but other farmers have had good results covering kale plants with several layers of polypropylene row cover for the



winter. This would be a good use for row cover that is too full of holes and tears to be used for insect protection.

The best varieties for overwintering are Red Russian and White Russian. They both produce a lot more stalks, with much higher quality, than dark green curly kale varieties such as Winterbor. However, for harvest into early winter, Winterbor is the most cold-hardy. For the main fall crop, I always grow both Red Russian and Winterbor, since some customers strongly prefer one or the other. Personally, I like the Red Russian a lot. It's far more tender and sweeter than any other variety I have tried.

Marketing

As a farmer trying to make a good income from a small acreage, kale truly stands out. Few crops can match it for ease of production, yield and speed of harvest. I've estimated that each plant can yield five large bunches per season. I have sold kale wholesale at \$1.50, and up to \$2.50 per bunch at a farmers' market. Even at the

wholesale price, \$7.50 per plant is very good. I would suggest that selling kale is the closest thing to a sure-fire profit-maker a market gardener has.

Harvesting, washing and packing fifty bunches an hour is easy, which at \$1.50 each, translates to \$75 per hour, and that's nothing to sneeze at!

The only challenge with this crop is finding a good market. Actually, it would be more accurate to say 'developing' a market, since kale is not a traditional food for most Canadians. Alex DeNicola, a long time Halifax market vendor of organic produce, has a great story about this. He left an open container of Red Russian kale sautéed with garlic and soy sauce on his market table. It was his lunch. A curious customer thought it was a sample tray and dug in. The customer was blown away and wanted to know what it was, how to cook it, and if there was any more for sale. Alex had a new customer who most likely would never have bought kale without the inadvertent sample he offered.

I've had similar things happen to me when feeding guests. Several years ago, a new friend and her ten-year-old son came for dinner. I made hamburgers and roasted potatoes with Red Russian kale. My friend politely took a small serving of kale and encouraged her son to do the same. He refused. She mentioned something about feeding him too much junk food and tried again to get him to try some greens. After giving up on getting her son to eat greens, she took a bite herself. She went wild for the kale, eating the little she had on her plate and then asking for seconds.

The only challenge with this crop is finding a good market.

As she ate the kale, she admitted that she'd never liked the kale she had bought from the supermarket. I explained that Red Russian is always more tender and sweet, and, in the late fall, the kale develops extra sweetness from our



Farmers' market lunchtime kale

—with thanks to Alex DeNicola

- One bunch fresh local kale, curly or Red Russian
- One onion, thinly sliced
- Lots of garlic, minced
- Olive oil and soy sauce

Sauté onions and garlic on low heat until they start to brown. Remove the stems from the kale, wash and chop. Add to the onions and garlic, sprinkle soy sauce on the kale, and cover with a tight fitting lid. Cook for a few minutes, turn the kale over, and cook for another few minutes. The more tender the kale, the less cooking time it needs. Experiment to find out how you like it best. As a rule, Red Russian kale cooks in half the time as curly green kale.

An option for meat-eaters: add pieces of cooked bacon to this recipe. It's delicious!

warm days and cold nights. The kale that is imported from a place where it is warm all the time has a more bitter, metallic taste; this can ruin the reputation of our fine northern vegetable!

Seeing his mother's reaction, my younger guest tried some kale and liked it just as much as his mom. After dinner, we went out to the fields in the dark with flashlights to pick kale for them to take home. The next spring, she signed up for our CSA and was a steady member for many years. When I overheard her telling other CSA members how wonderful kale is and how she cooked it, I knew that my kale promotion efforts were not in vain.

Season extension

Another way to sell more kale is to extend its season by growing it in an unheated hoop house or low tunnel. I've harvested kale right through the winter this way. In late February, however, mildew tends to develop on the kale. I avoid this problem by trying to harvest the

crop by the beginning of February. By early March, the same plants that were stripped of every leaf will be ready to harvest again. This time, the harvest will be a tender new growth of leaves and flower shoots. After about three weeks, the flower shoots will start getting tough no matter how promptly they are harvested. Fortunately, by then, the kale that overwintered outdoors will be ready to harvest. To minimize the time between the last overwintered kale and the first spring crop, I start seedlings in early March and transplant them as soon as the ground can be worked. Using row cover on the early spring kale will provide much needed warmth for faster growth.

Ted Hutten of Hutten Family Farm in Lakeville, Nova Scotia, shared another technique with me. He digs up kale plants, roots and all, and stores them in apple bins with damp sawdust around the roots. The bins are kept in a dark barn basement with no loss of colour through January. Ted reports that his customers at the Halifax

Brewery Market go wild for anything green in the dead of winter, gladly paying \$4 per pound for the stored kale.

Raymond Parker of Roseway Farm in Popular Grove, Nova Scotia, passed on another great kale storage tip. He puts up kale for the winter by freezing it straight out of the garden. No blanching necessary. Since kale is so cold hardy, it can be frozen in plastic bags and come out almost as good as fresh. Warning! Please don't try this with any ordinary vegetable. Extreme vegetable mushiness will result.

I put up many bags this way for my own use this winter and am very pleased with the results. Next November, I plan to market ready-to-freeze bags of kale with an instruction and recipe sheet.

Building a market for kale makes sense for so many reasons. If it becomes a staple in Canadian kitchens, local vegetable growers would have an easy-to-grow, highly profitable crop that can be sold over much of the winter. At the table, kale is a nutritional powerhouse, rich in minerals, vitamins and all round green goodness. It's also absolutely delicious when harvested at its prime and cooked properly. As more farmers, chefs, food writers and other promoters of good farming and eating get behind this great crop, I hope to see the day when a majority of Canadians would agree that, "kale is kool!"

David Greenberg farms and writes with his wife, Jenn Greenberg (née Scott), in Centre Burlington, Nova Scotia. He has spent 15 years growing organic produce for CSAs, farmers' markets and wholesale accounts.

Photo credits: Jenn Greenberg

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to appreciate high quality salt. It makes a big difference in the quality of the ferment.

Whey, 1/4 cup (60 ml). It's optional (sort of). Whey is the liquid left over from making cheese. Another form is the liquid that separates out of yogurt. This is not a traditional Asian ingredient. The whey adds a tangy depth of flavour. Some people claim that whey helps ferments keep longer and reduces the need for as much salt.

To make the kimchi, I mix everything together in a big bowl, dividing the ingredients into manageable batches. Instead of pounding the ferment as you would if making sauerkraut, I use a more gentle kneading and wringing action. I squeeze and press until the ingredients are well mixed and juices are running out of the cabbage.

I fill sterilized one-gallon jars with the mix, topping up with extra water if the juices don't cover the mix by at least one inch. When making ferments in a glass jar, add more water whenever the liquid gets below the solids. This will help keep mould and off flavours from developing.



Kimchi ingredients ready for mixing.



Kimchi ready for storing.

I have also made kimchi and other ferments in five-gallon plastic buckets with a Ziploc bag filled with brine laid directly on top of the ferment to keep the air off it.

Some people leave their ferments out for a few days at room temperature to get the process going. Since I am aiming for maximum shelf life, I like to put mine straight into the fridge or cold room.

I start eating my kimchi within a few weeks of making it and find it can keep for many months. As I write this on July 30th, the kimchi made last October is mould-free and perfectly good to eat, long after the straggler vegetables from the root cellar have found new life in the compost pile.

—David Greenberg

Photo credits: Jenn Greenberg