Brassica oleracea Flowering Kale, Ornamental Cabbage

Edward F. Gilman

Introduction
Ornamental cabbage (Acephala group) does not make the tight head common on cabbages sold in the grocery store (Capitata group) (Fig. 1). Leaves on ornamental cabbage are edible but more showy than the Capitata group, and they are displayed in loose, showy rosettes. Veins are prominently displayed on the underside of the leaves. Leaf coloration patterns range from red and green, solid blue, to white, and green. Good coloration is brought on by temperatures below 60°F, hence the plant is used in the fall, winter and spring. Seed is available that reliably produces each of these leaf coloration patterns.

General Information
Scientific name: Brassica oleracea
Pronunciation: BRASS-ick-uh awl-lur-RAY-see
Common name(s): flowering kale, ornamental kale, ornamental cabbage

Family: Cruciferae
Plant type: annual; biennial
USDA hardiness zones: all zones (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 7: Oct; Feb; Mar
Planting month for zone 8: Nov; Dec
Planting month for zone 9: Dec; Jan; Feb
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: Dec; Jan; Feb
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: edging; attracts butterflies
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description
Height: .5 to 1 feet
Spread: 1 to 1.5 feet
Plant habit: round
Plant density: dense

Figure 1. Flowering kale.

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.


2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.
Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: spiral
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: parted
Leaf shape: orbiculate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: not applicable
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green; purple or red; variegated
Fall color: not applicable
Fall characteristic: not applicable

Flower
Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristic: showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown
Fruit cover: unknown
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: unknown
Plant spacing: 12 to 18 inches

Other
Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management
Cabbage can be used reliably as a bedding plant in the fall and spring throughout the deep south. Some die back may occur in the coolest regions of the south and into north Florida in a very cold winter. It can be used throughout the winter in central and south Florida. When flowers begin to appear, it is time to remove the plants and replant with a more heat tolerant bedding plant.

With warm temperatures in central and south Florida, some cultivars may not provide the showiness desirable of ornamental cabbage except in the winter.

Pests and Diseases
Caterpillars can eat holes in the leaves. Although this does not kill the plant, it makes them unattractive.