

Brassica oleracea Flowering Kale, Ornamental Cabbage¹

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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.

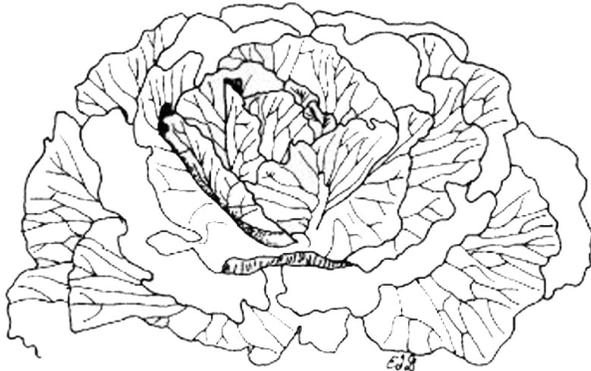


Figure 1. Flowering kale.

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

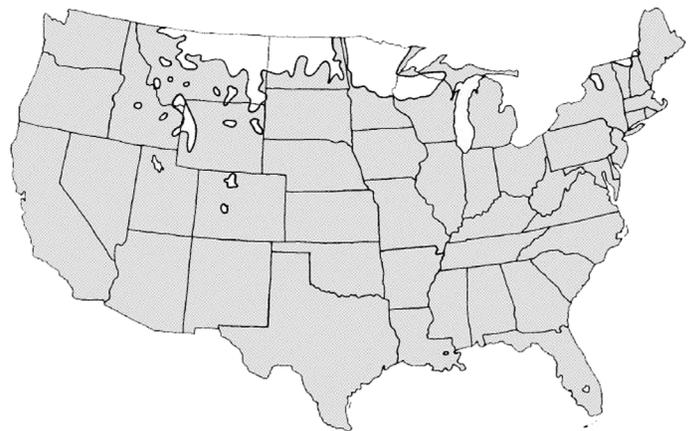


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: .5 to 1 feet

Spread: 1 to 1.5 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

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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.