Italian Broccoli
(Brassica oleracea var. italica)

History

Broccoli, a cool season relative of cabbage, is believed to have originated in southern Italy. It has a long history of cultivation having been developed by the Romans from wild cabbage. It was grown then, and still now for its clusters of flower buds and the tender stems and leaves near them. The Romans held broccoli in high esteem as an important vegetable, which to this day is often associated with Italian cuisine. It is alleged that broccoli was grown for its floral shoots in Asia Minor and was brought by navigators to Italy. The word “broccoli” comes from the Latin brachium, meaning (branch) or (arm), and refers to the treelike shape of the plant.

Characteristics

At maturity broccoli is two to three feet tall, with leaves of equal spread. The tip of the stem develops clusters of buds from six to ten inches across. Some cultivars develop early, while others are midseason varieties. A 15-foot row yields about ten pounds of broccoli over a period of five weeks.

Varieties of Broccoli

Broccoli (Brassica rapa var. ruvo) is native to the Mediterranean region is related to members of the mustard family. A favorite in Italy for centuries, it was introduced by Italian immigrants who settled in the United States over one hundred years ago. This variety of broccoli is slightly bitter and its stalks are usually preferred to the leaves.

Italian broccoli (Brassica oleracea var. italica) is very green, but some varieties are also white or purple. Like other species of broccoli, it too is harvested before the yellow flowers bloom. It is generally eaten raw or cooked. It is often served with a dip, in an appetizer, or added to a salad.

Cultivation

Plant seeds or transplants in soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.0. The plants do best when temperatures remain between 40° and 70° over a growing period of 110 days. For the best growth and harvest, plant broccoli as a transplanted seedling. Remove basal leaves and bury the seedlings deep so the stem is covered and the plant stands up straight and sturdy.

Garden Pests
Cabbage Worm causes leaf and floret damage to broccoli plants. Preemptive measures against the worm are by dusting the plant with a biological control called Bacillus thuringiensis, or BT, since it works best on the larvae.

Another pest of broccoli, Cutworm, will eat the stems of seedlings. To prevent damage, slip over each seedling a paper cup that has had its bottom removed. This will effectively fence out the invaders.

**Harvesting and Buying**

Select broccoli that is firm and evenly colored with a stem about six inches beneath the floret buds. After the main stem is cut, side branches will continue to produce small branches and florets over a period of ten weeks.

When buying broccoli, avoid open flowers, wilted, or bruised stems that are losing its buds, as it is neither fresh nor tender. The outer leaves should be green and the stems should be firm.

**Nutritional Facts**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cooked</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrate</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiber</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calories</td>
<td>28</td>
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Per 100 g

Broccoli is a good source of vitamin C and potassium as well as folic acid and vitamin A, magnesium, panothenic acid, iron and phosphorus. Like other members of the Cole family, broccoli contains beta-carotenes (these are believed to be anticarcinogenic).

**Prepared for Serving**

Broccoli boiled or steamed is tender and is often covered with seasonings, sauces, cheeses, or dressings. A favorite Italian meal is Broccoli Florentine and is prepared with the following items.

**Broccoli Florentine**

- 1 large bunch broccoli (about 1-1/2 lbs)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
Separate broccoli into florets and peel the stalks. Cook in water for ten to twelve minutes or until tender. Drain water and place broccoli stems aside. In large frying pan under medium heat sauté garlic in oil until brown. Add broccoli stems and turn in the flavored oil. Season broccoli with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot with chicken or fish.