

Brassica oleracea: Flowering Kale, Ornamental Kale, Ornamental Cabbage¹

Keighly Graves, Wendy Wilber, Tom Wichman, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein²

<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.

Introduction

Brassica oleracea is a very diverse species of plants in the crucifer family (Brassicaceae), which contains brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, collards, kale, and cabbage. Ornamental cabbage (within the Acephala group) belongs to this species and is a landscape plant that is generally grown for its showy leaves and aesthetic appeal in the landscape. It is a biennial plant but is generally treated as an annual. Ornamental cabbage leaves are displayed in loose, showy rosettes with veins prominently displayed on the underside of the leaf (Figure 1). Leaf coloration may be green, blue, white, pink, red, or multi-colored. Good coloration is brought on by temperatures below 60°F, hence the plant being used in the fall, winter, and spring (Figure 2). The leaves are waxy, with an undulated leaf margin, which adds texture to the plant (Figure 3). Ornamental cabbage leaves are technically edible, but cabbages in the Capitata group are the common varieties that are sold for consumption. Ornamental cabbage is dramatic in mass plantings, may be used as borders, or in containers or above-ground planters (Figure 4).



Figure 1. Full form—*Brassica oleracea*: flowering cabbage.

Credit: svetlanais via Adobe Stock



Figure 2. Full form—*Brassica oleracea*: flowering cabbage.

Credit: Mahey via Adobe Stock



Figure 3. Full form—*Brassica oleracea*: flowering cabbage.

Credit: Stephen via Adobe Stock



Figure 4. Full form—*Brassica oleracea*: flowering cabbage mass planting.

Credit: AngelLuis via Adobe Stock

General Information

Scientific name: *Brassica oleracea*

Pronunciation: BRASS-ick-uh awl-lur-RAY-see

Common name(s): flowering kale, ornamental kale, flowering cabbage, ornamental cabbage

Family: *Brassicaceae*

Plant type: annual; biennial

USDA hardiness zones: all zones (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 3B-11A

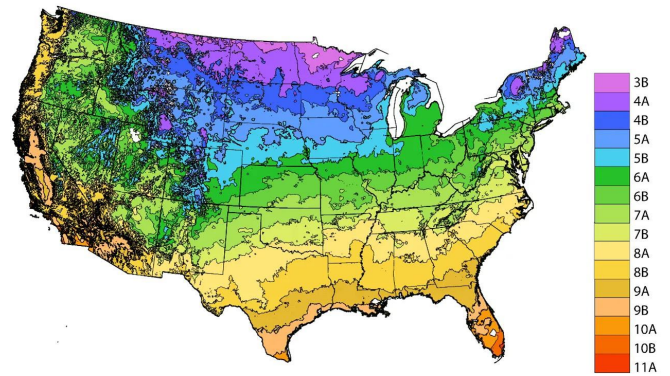


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 3B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 7B-11A

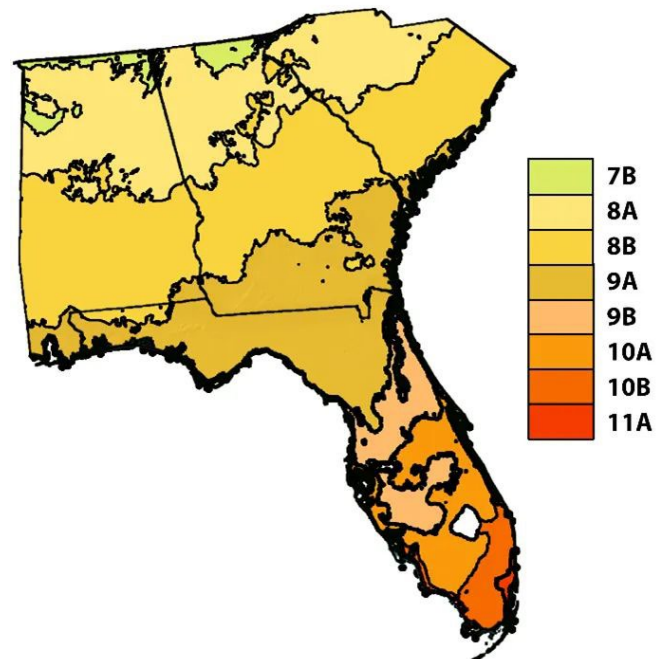


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 7B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

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 zones 10 and 11: Dec; Jan; Feb

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: edging; attracts butterflies; mass planting; container; border

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral, rosulate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: parted, undulate

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: not applicable

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green; blue; white; purple; pink; red; variegated

Fall color: not applicable

Fall characteristic: not applicable

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: less than 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

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 ornamental foliage

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Toxicity: may cause livestock poisoning when consumed in large quantities

Use and Management

Ornamental cabbage makes an excellent cool-season bedding plant in the fall and spring. Some dieback 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. Ornamental cabbage plants should be removed and replaced with more heat-tolerant bedding plants once they flower. The vibrant colors of ornamental cabbage make this plant very showy in a mass planting. It is also suitable for smaller groupings, container gardens, or borders in gardens. Caution should be taken not to locate this plant around livestock or horses, as plants in the *Brassica* genus are known to cause various issues if consumed in large quantities.

With warm temperatures in central and south Florida, some cultivars may not provide the showiness desirable of ornamental cabbage except in the winter. Ornamental cabbage is cold tolerant, but excessive cold can damage the leaves. Care should be taken to prevent frost damage. Cultivars with various leaf colorations and leaf margins, compact growth forms, and different textures are available.

Ornamental cabbage is propagated by seed.

Design Considerations

Ornamental cabbage is an ideal plant for fall and winter interest. Their large, rosette shape and vibrant colors (pinks, purples, creams, and greens) command attention. They are not subtle background plants. Use them

intentionally where you want a pop of color and bold texture. Pair them with the delicate foliage of pansies and violas, the fine needles of dwarf juniper, or the wispy blades of ornamental grasses to highlight the unique form of each plant. They can be used in drifts or blocks to create a dramatic effect. The coarse, broad texture of ornamental cabbage contrasts beautifully with fine-textured plants. In addition, ornamental cabbage in a container can be a stunning focal point on a porch or patio.

Pests and Diseases

Pest issues include caterpillars (cause aesthetic damage to plants), aphids, and slugs. Disease issues include *Alternaria* leafspot, rot, club root, and blackleg. Ensure proper cultural conditions to promote plant health.

¹ This document is FPS72, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised July 2022 and February 2026. Visit the Ask IFAS website at <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/> for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/.*

² Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Wendy Wilber, state program coordinator and Extension agent IV, UF/IFAS Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program; Tom Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Horticultural Sciences; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; 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 operate in compliance with applicable federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. 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. Andra Johnson, Dean for UF/IFAS Extension.