

Garden Cress in the Garden

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Summary

Garden cress or pepper-grass is an annual herb that was introduced to the United States from China. Garden cress grows best in cultivated areas that receive full sun or partial shade with moist soils. Garden cress is a very easy plant to grow. Garden cress can also be grown in a window sill or container. Garden cress is usually cultivated for its leaves, which are used in salads, on sandwiches, and as baby greens. The leaves and seed pods have a peppery taste.

Recommended Varieties

Common varieties include Wrinkled, Crinkled, Crumpled, Persian, and Curly. Purchase seed from a local nursery or seed catalogs.

How to Grow

Soil: Garden cress does well in all soil types as long as they are moist and nutrient rich.

Soil Preparation: Before planting, incorporate 4-6 inches of well-composted organic matter and 1-2 lb of all-purpose fertilizer (16-16-8) per 100 square feet. Work compost and fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches.

Planting: Garden cress is planted by seed. Broadcast the seeds by randomly scattering them over the planting area or by mass planting them in rows. Rows should be about 3-4 inches apart. Once seedlings have emerged, thin plants to 8-12 inches apart. Re-sow seeds every 2 weeks for a continuous supply of fresh leaves. Plant seeds ¼-½ inch deep. Garden cress does not tolerate frost so plant near the frost free date for your area.

Water: Garden cress performs best if soil remains very moist. If planting in containers, make sure to water them every few days keeping the soil moist. Drought stress during growth will greatly reduce yield.



Fertility: Cress has very low fertilizer requirements due to the short growing time for the plants. For container grown plants, fertilize periodically with a soluble liquid fertilizer.

Problems

Weeds: Control weeds through regular cultivation, but avoid root damage that slows plant growth by damaging shallow roots. Weed control is particularly important during the first months of growth when plants are growing slowly and compete poorly. Organic mulches such as grass clippings, straw and shredded newspaper help conserve water and control weeds.

No specific diseases or insect problems are reported for this plant.

Harvest and Storage

Harvest begins 2-3 weeks after emergence when the leaves are 2 inches long. Remove the older leaves for immediate use and leave the young ones so the plant doesn't stop growing. A 10 to 15 foot row of garden cress usually provides enough for the average family.

By planting several 5 foot rows at different times, a steady supply of fresh cress will be available for fresh use.

Uses

Garden cress is used in salads, soups, on sandwiches, and as baby greens. Garden cress is also used to treat inflammation, acne, and skin infections and it acts as a blood purifier, diuretic and expectorant.

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