

# Hearty varieties

Cabbage tends to be included among the unimaginative vegetables yet it is one of the most versatile and economical. Its name comes from the Latin *caput* meaning head (not "the end" which is the more modern interpretation). Though it is a near relative of cauliflower and the various kales, cabbage is rarely rated as highly. It is believed to have originated in western Asia, but today's varieties are descended from the wild or sea cabbage which grew on the coastal areas of Europe. The main types are winter, red, Chinese leaves, savoy, summer and spring cabbage.

When choosing cabbage, it should be fresh, with crisp leaves, to be in good condition. The base of the stalk should be clean and not slimy. Like all green vegetables, cabbage is best used up quickly. Winter cabbage,

red and white, keep longest — up to 6 days in a cool, airy place; 10 days in a fridge. Wrap dry, uncooked cabbage in plastic film. Cabbage should never be overcooked. Unpleasant odour is the first indication that it has gone past the *al dente* stage — too much cooking causes a chemical reaction and that's what has helped give cabbage a bad name (and smell!). Cabbage, shredded, needs only 3–5 minutes in not too much boiling salted water; quarters, 7–10 minutes. Cabbage contains calcium and vitamins A and C, and is also a good source of dietary roughage (fibre). Top quality cabbage freezes well: shred and blanch for 1 minute (add 1 teasp (5ml) vinegar to help retain colour). It keeps for 6 months, and needs very little cooking from frozen.

Pictured right

**1 Chinese leaves** Attractively shaped vegetable that's a cross between a lettuce and a cabbage. The stalks are white and crisp. It's just as good eaten raw in salads as it is cooked.

It can also be called Chinese cabbage.  
**2 Savoy cabbage** The prettiest of the cabbages with bright, dark green and crimped leaves. There are early and late varieties and they are harvested from mid-winter to late spring. Savoys have a strong, pleasant flavour and need to be lightly cooked.

**3 Summer and autumn cabbage** Hardy varieties, less subject to damage. Solid and round, with a delicate green colour almost through to the heart, summer cabbages have large outer green, well-veined leaves. The autumn cabbages tend to be more bluish green, with a tinge of purple. Best shredded and served raw.

**4 Spring cabbage** Bright and crisp, tender and succulent, and needing little cooking. Often sold in winter, when still semi-hearted, under the name of spring greens. The hearted varieties (the true spring cabbages) appear later when other greens are scarce. One of the best kinds to stuff, as leaves are not so tightly packed. The hearts tend to be pointed or conical. Pictured left

**White cabbage** Often known as Dutch cabbage because of the vast quantities grown in Holland and exported. It is also called "drumhead" cabbage because of its tightly-packed circular shape. Although it is an autumn and winter cabbage, it can be stored till spring in controlled chilling conditions. The colour can vary from pale green to white, and the outer leaves are usually trimmed before the cabbage is sold. Best for coleslaw, or pickled as sauerkraut.

**Red cabbage** Very similar to white cabbage in shape, but the core and ribs are often thicker. For freshness, always choose a head with a slight sheen. Very good when shredded and added to salads or when pickled. It should always be cooked very gently so that it doesn't lose its colour (vinegar is usually added as well to prevent it turning bluish). It is nearly always well seasoned with a variety of flavourings added (see also page 22).

