
FALL FLOWERING KALE

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If you are looking for an easy to grow crop that can extend your fall sales season, you might consider ornamental kale. When mature they form large loose rosettes of leaves with either white, pink or purple centers ringed by green. The colors develop fully only with the onset of cool weather, usually not until October in Northern Indiana. Planted outside they will remain in good condition until temperatures fall below 20°F. Recent variety introductions offer a range of leaf shapes, colors, and sizes.

Production: We find it best to grow them as a fall crop. If planted in spring, summer heat will cause the stalk to stretch dramatically. This year we did not sow seed until late June and early July, but by Mid September had plants 15-20" across. Seedlings were transplanted from the flat to 48 ct. cell packs. We do sell a few plants retail at this stage. After 4-5 weeks in the packs, we shift to the final pot size, a 7-1/2" azalea, with only one plant per pot. During each transplanting, we place the plant deep enough to bury any stem stretch. You could use a growth

regulator on the young plants as well. For best quality, finish the plants outside in full sun. Automatic tube watering would be helpful for they use lots of water during the hot summer days. Fertilizer is injected at each watering but at low rates of 200 ppm. Cabbage loopers are early pests, although this year whiteflies were a problem as well. Cool weather decreases most insect feeding. Kale does not seem to be prone to root rots or leaf diseases.

Marketing: We grow and display the kale alongside the garden mums to make sure customers notice them. Many are sold to people who stop by in late October still expecting to buy mums. Most of our customers are not yet familiar with kale so we try to explain that though very cold tolerant, kale is not a perennial. Also that they can be used as indoor decoration for a short time but will quickly fade or bolt to seed in such warm conditions. We are hoping to increase sales as people become more aware of ornamental kale's possibilities, and people who have tried them become repeat buyers.
