About – Cabbage is a cruciferous vegetable that is closely related to kale, broccoli, kohlrabi, brussel sprouts and cauliflower. The history of cabbage dates back over 4,000 years with origins in the Mediterranean region. Evidence exists that it has been domestically cultivated for over 2,500 years. The Celts are credited with bringing it to Europe around 600 B.C. where it soon became a major crop. In 1536, the French explorer Jacques Cartier brought cabbage to America.

The two most common varieties found in today’s supermarket are green cabbage and red cabbage. Red cabbage actually varies in color based on the soil in which it was grown. It will be red if grown in acidic soil and purple, almost blue, if grown in alkaline soil. Cabbage is a cool-weather crop that is available year-around, but most abundant in late fall. Several darker outer wrapper leaves protect the edible portion of the head, thus the inner leaves are usually lighter in color. The size of cabbage heads vary tremendously from as little as one pound to upwards of seven pounds or more. Of note, acre for acre, cabbage will yield more edible vegetable mass than any other plant.

Selection - When selecting cabbage, look for heads that are firm and compact. They should be free from insect damage, black spots or blemishes and the leaves should not be wilted. With the wide range in sizes, choose a head that is appropriately sized so it can be used in one to two weeks. Avoid heads that are cracked.

Storage - Cabbage can be stored in a plastic bag in the crisper draw of your refrigerator for up to two weeks. If you cut the head in half, store the remaining portion of the head by sprinkling a couple of drops of water on the cut portion of the head before placing it in the plastic bag and returning it to the refrigerator. Once cut, you should use the remainder of the head within a few days.

Preparation and Uses – Remove the thick, outer leaves and discard them. Although they protect the inside, cabbage should still be thoroughly rinsed under running water immediately prior to preparation. Cabbage can be used in a number of ways. It can be boiled for soups and other dishes; it can be shredded and fermented yielding dishes such as German sauerkraut and Korean kimchi; the leaves can be wrapped around other ingredients forming a cabbage roll and baked; and it can be eaten raw. Red or green cabbage can be used interchangeably; however, the anthocyanin that gives red cabbage its color will leach into other ingredients. It will also turn blue in an alkaline environment. An acidic agent such as lemon juice or wine can be added to return the red coloration. Always cut cabbage with a stainless steel knife otherwise the high concentration of phytonutrients found in cabbage will react with carbon steel and turn the leaves black.

Perhaps the most common and popular use of green cabbage is coleslaw. Simply shred the raw cabbage and combine it with a wide array of commercial or homemade dressings to make coleslaw. Add some red cabbage and shredded carrots for a bit of color if you like. Red cabbage also makes a colorful and flavorful addition to a fresh green salad.

Nutrition – Cabbage is one of the most nutritious vegetables in the Produce department. Besides a massive volume of evidence linking cabbage and other cruciferous vegetables to lowering the risk of several forms of cancer, cabbage contains several important vitamins. Among them are: vitamins K (73% of the RDA); vitamin C (30% of the RDA); vitamin B1 and vitamin B2. Cabbage is a good source of dietary fiber and is low in calories.

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