

# Bok Choy

*Brassica rapa var. chinensis*

Bok choy, also spelled pak choi or bok choi, and known by some as pechay, translates to “white vegetable,” but the tender leaves can be dark green, pale green, or even red. The fleshy stems of some varieties are pure white, and excellent in stir-fries!

**TIP** – Bok choy bolts prematurely if the weather heats up quickly, and also if a cold spell occurs. If spring is fleeting in your area, try growing it in fall.

**Location and soil** Grow bok choy in full sun in cool weather. Plants will be less apt to bolt if provided with light shade on hot days. Bok choy produces best in rich, humusy soil.

**When to Plant** In cold winter climates, start spring plantings indoors about 3 weeks before the last frost date. Wait until after the last frost date to plant outdoors, as bok choy has a tendency to bolt prematurely if exposed to frost. Fall crops can be direct-seeded or started in flats 40 to 50 days before the first frost. In warm climates, plant seeds directly into the garden in early spring for a late spring harvest; sow successive crops in fall. Seeds will germinate in a wide range of soil temperatures – between 50° and 80°F.

**Seed depth and Spacing** If direct-seeding, sow seeds 1 to 2 inches apart in rows, allowing about 18 inches between rows. Cover lightly with 1/4-inch of soil and gently pat the soil for good soil to seed contact. Keep the rows evenly moist for fast germination.

**Germination** Seed will sprout in 4 to 8 days.

**Thinning** Thin seedlings when they are 2 to 4 inches tall so that they are spaced 8 to 10 inches apart.

**Care** Water regularly and cover with shade cloth to protect plants from the mid-day sun on hot days. Stress-free plants are less likely to bolt.

**Pests** Flea beetles, which produce numerous small holes in young leaves, are a problem in many parts of the country. Cover plants with row cover to exclude the pest. If flea beetle damage becomes severe, delay plantings until the pest pressure subsides in late summer.

**Fertilize** Fertilize with an all-purpose vegetable food or organic kelp fertilizer at the time of planting.

**Harvest** Bok choy is generally cut at soil level and harvested all at once when it gets to a good size (or when plants begin to bolt), but outer leaves can be harvested along the way. Plants mature in 45 to 60 days.

**Nutrition** Bok choy is an excellent source of vitamins A, C, and K. It is a good source vitamins B6, folate, calcium, iron, potassium, and manganese.



## Cabbage Without a Head

Bok choy is a type of Chinese cabbage, but unlike most cabbages it does not form heads. It also differs from most other cabbages in its maturation time. While some heading cabbages can take up to 200 days to mature and reach 50 pounds or more (the record is 144 pounds!), petite bok choy is stir-fry-ready in as little as 40 days from sowing. Like other cabbage family members, it is highly nutritious, and associated with lower risk of certain types of cancer.