VEGETABLES · A ROOMY PATIO POT IN COOL WEATHER

Let's grow kale.

Brassica oleracea (Acephala Group)

This plan is for **Compact edible curly kale; one plant**

One leafy plant. Pick from the outside in.

5-gallon pot **1 nursery start**

Before you start

Start outdoors in cool spring or fall weather. Use a compact edible variety; an exposed pot needs a local winter-protection plan.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 26, 2026 View sources

LIGHT

Sun or part shade

Use a sunny outdoor spot in cool weather; some shade is tolerated, but a dark patio will slow leaf growth.

WATER

Steady moisture

Repeated drought can leave the leaves tougher.

FEEDING

Regular after starter feed

A long harvest season needs nutrition beyond the initial mix.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ One 5-gallon planter with drainage
- ✓ 1 compact edible kale nursery start
- ✓ Fresh potting mix and clean scissors

THE SOIL

Miracle-Gro Organic Potting Mix (US, with starter nutrients; check your bag for additional-feeding directions)

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One pot. Here's the plan.

A roomy patio pot in cool weather. Start with **nursery start**.

THE POT

5-gallon pot

Choose a stable pot with drainage, roughly 12 inches wide or more.

HOW MANY

1 nursery start

Choose one compact edible curly kale from the vegetable section; keep its variety label.

THE CONTAINER

5-gallon pot

START WITH

1 nursery start





Illustration · not to scale

5-gallon pot · 1 nursery start Choose a stable pot with drainage, roughly 12 inches wide or more. Choose one compact edible curly kale from the vegetable section; keep its variety label. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Choose a small, healthy start

Buy one compact edible kale with about 4–6 developed leaves and a rooted nursery plug. Check the undersides for insects before bringing it home.

02

Give it the whole pot

Dampen the mix and plant the root ball at its nursery soil level. Leave space below the rim for watering.

03

Help it settle in

Water thoroughly and keep an eye on the mix each morning. Let an indoor-grown start adjust gradually to outdoor sun.

04 Pick the outside leaves

Once new growth is established, harvest a few of the older outer leaves. Leave the center and several healthy leaves to keep growing.

Help with the setup: drainage holes and saucers · potting mix vs. garden soil.

Other ways to start

Start with 2 seeds

Sow 2 seeds ½ inch deep near the center of the final pot. Keep the surface moist. Once seedlings have 3–4 true leaves, snip the weaker one and keep one plant.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

For a rooted plant, check each morning. Water when the top inch is dry; drain. Keep the seed layer moist if starting from seed.

FERTILIZER

Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16)

AMOUNT

1 tablespoon in 1 US gallon of water

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Mix into water. Apply only enough solution to wet this pot and drain; the mixing batch is not the amount to pour on.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

Every 14 days during active growth, once additional food is due.

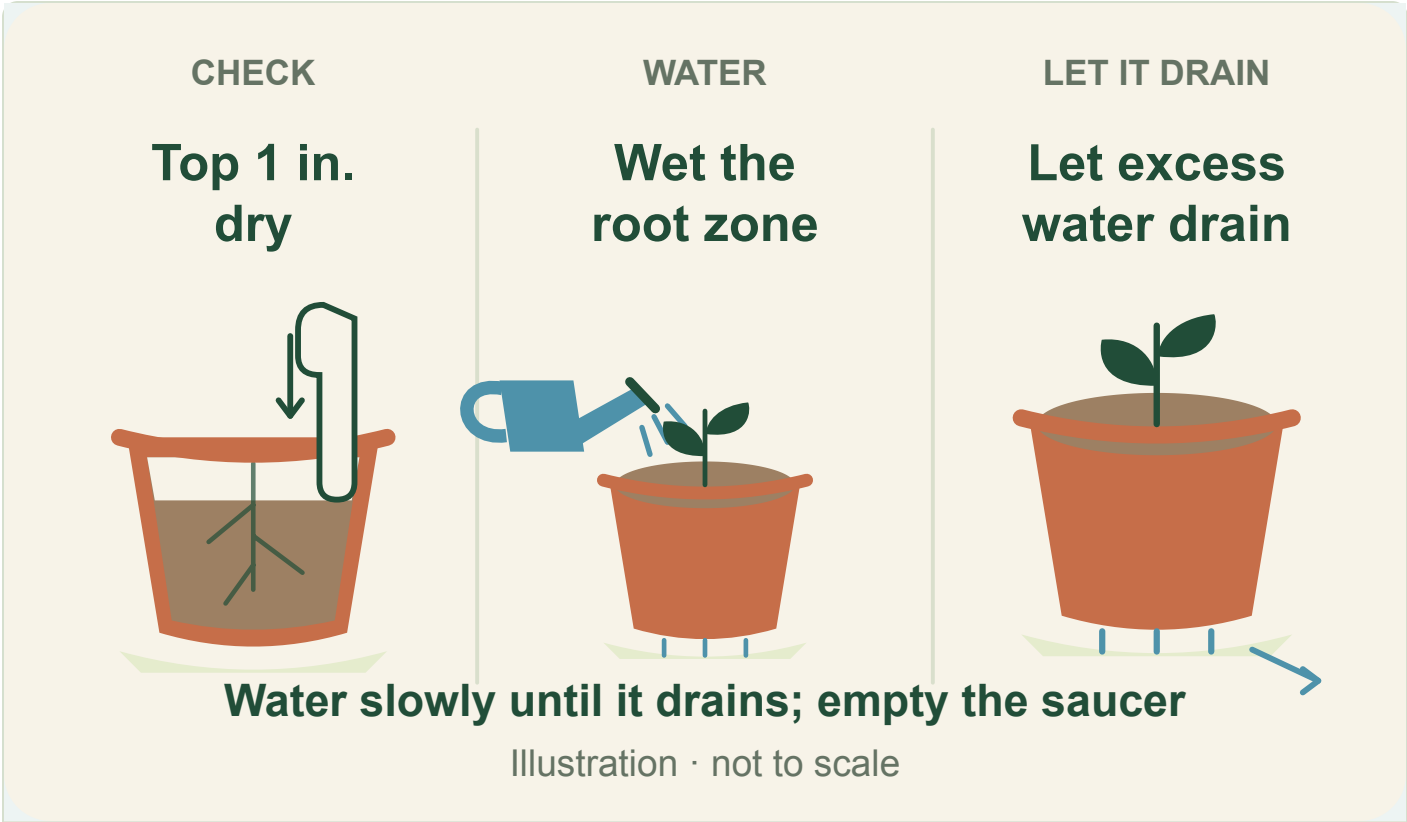
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Use the actual mix bag's directions for the start date. Delay if the pot is wet, pause when growth stops, and do not stack full-rate feeds.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

For a rooted nursery start, check each morning. When the top inch feels dry, water slowly until excess escapes below; wait if still damp. In wind or heat, check again later. If starting from seed instead, keep the shallow seeded layer moist until emergence. Aim for even moisture, not a fixed daily cup of water.



Check before watering. For a rooted plant, check each morning. Water when the top inch is dry; drain. Keep the seed layer moist if starting from seed. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

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02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

Use the fresh enriched mix without extra fertilizer at planting. Follow your purchased bag's directions for when to begin additional feeding. Repeated leaf harvests can outlast the starter nutrients; a fixed two-month waiting rule does not fit every bag or growing situation.



1 tablespoon in 1 US gallon of water Mix into water. Apply only enough solution to wet this pot and drain; the mixing batch is not the amount to pour on. Every 14 days during active growth, once additional food is due. Use the actual mix bag's directions for the start date. Delay if the pot is wet, pause when growth stops, and do not stack full-rate feeds. Original illustration; not to scale.



US PRODUCT REFERENCE

Miracle-Gro

Water Soluble All Purpose

24-8-16

Soluble: mix into water

Check the official US product ↗

Illustrated reference; check the manufacturer's current packaging and US label.

WHEN MORE FOOD IS DUE AND NEW LEAVES ARE GROWING

Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16)

Mix 1 level tablespoon of Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food (US 24-8-16) into 1 US gallon of water. Feed at the roots every 14 days during active growth, using just enough solution to wet this pot and drain. The gallon is a mixing batch, not one plant's serving. Delay if the pot is wet; pause when growth stops. Do not combine full-rate feeds.

Check the manufacturer's product page ↗

The 14-day interval uses the slower end of the named product's 7–14-day outdoor directions. It is a starting routine, not a kale-specific trial result; follow your package.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

When to start picking outer leaves

For a nursery start, wait until it has settled and is making new leaves before a first small harvest. For the seed route, use the packet's emergence estimate and allow time to build a leafy plant first. A seed-to-maturity date is not a countdown from the day you bought a start.

Cool-weather planting and winter limits

Cool spring and fall conditions suit kale. A garden plant's cold tolerance does not guarantee that a small exposed pot will overwinter in every US climate.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

What is chewing holes in the leaves?

Look underneath and along the leaf ribs for caterpillars. On one small plant, removing visible caterpillars by hand is a useful first check before choosing any treatment.

Do I need to wait for frost before picking?

No. Pick usable outer leaves once the plant is established and keep the center growing. Cool weather and frost can improve flavor, but frost is not a harvest requirement. Do not assume a pot can survive every winter just because garden kale is cold-hardy.

Why are the leaves getting tough?

Older leaves, hot conditions, and drying stress can all affect texture. Pick younger outer leaves and check the pot's moisture.

Choosing the pot and variety

Give one kale plant room to grow

Five gallons gives one compact kale room for repeated leaf harvests. This is our simple container choice within Extension's 3–5-gallon guidance for kale and greens, not a densely sown baby-leaf tray or a yield guarantee.

Check the kale variety's mature size

Dwarf Blue Curled Vates is one compact edible example; Burpee lists it around 16 inches tall and 12 inches wide. A nursery start need not be that exact cultivar, but check that its label describes a compact vegetable kale. Tall types and ornamental fall displays need their own growing plan.

Help with your next step.

Check the food already in your potting mix

Use the actual bag's directions to decide when your long-lived leafy crop needs more food.

Compare beginner edible projects

See how this one-start approach differs from other simple crops for the kitchen.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- Utah State University: seed depth, leaves, and cool-weather growth ↗
  https://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/research/kale-in-the-garden
- Manufacturer: starter feed in the named potting mix ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/potting-mix/miracle-gro-organic-potting-mix/78951430.html
- Manufacturer: US fertilizer formula and application directions ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/plant-food-and-care/miracle-gro-water-soluble-all-purpose-plant-food.html
- University of Maryland: container moisture and nutrition ↗
  https://extension.umd.edu/resource/growing-vegetables-containers-and-salad-tables
- Alabama Extension: container size for kale and winter protection ↗
  https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/flowers/container-gardening/
- Burpee: Dwarf Blue Curled Vates cultivar size and edible use ↗
  https://www.burpee.com/products/kale-dwarf-blue-curled-vates-prod000723

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.