Last week we discussed kale; this week we will talk about one of kale’s cousins, cabbage. Cabbage has been a staple in New England for a long time and it is easy to store. It needs moist, cool conditions to grow well – this summer was both. Cabbage plants take up a fair amount of room in the garden – one per square foot. Nevertheless, red and pale green cabbage heads look particularly beautiful in the autumn garden. Try growing “savoy” varieties too – their crinkly heads have a nice texture and a sweet flavor.

Here are some cabbage tips and facts:

- Cabbages should be harvested before a hard frost – see our “frost” section in this issue — but a light frost makes them taste even better.
- The chemicals that give red cabbage its color are called anthocyanins and they change color depending on the other chemicals around them.
- For the sweetest, mildest cabbage flavor, use moderate heat to steam or sauté cabbage. High heat breaks down other chemicals in cabbage that release sulfur and cause a strong taste and smell.
- Cabbage leaves can be used to wrap patties made from meat, rice and herbs. These cabbage “rolls” are then cooked in some broth – an eastern European favorite.
Recipe: Cabbage Soup With Apples and Thyme

Thyme really shines in this soup; sautéed apples are an interesting sweet garnish. This recipe is adapted from www.epicurious.com.

3 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
8 cups thinly sliced cored green cabbage (about 1/2 large head)
1 large onion, chopped
8 large fresh thyme sprigs or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
6 cups low-salt chicken or vegetable broth
1 1/4 pounds Golden Delicious apples (2-3 apples), peeled, cored, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
Chopped fresh thyme

Melt 1 tablespoon butter with oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Add cabbage and onion; sauté until vegetables wilt and brown, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Add 8 thyme sprigs and sauté 1 minute longer. Add broth and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. (Soup can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Rewarm before serving.)

Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Add apples and sauté until brown and tender, stirring occasionally, about 12 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Remove thyme sprigs from soup. Ladle soup into bowls; garnish with apples and chopped fresh thyme and serve.

Autumn Frost is on Its Way

Autumn has arrived and you may have noticed that the days and nights have become cooler. You may also have noticed that the coolest nights have had very few clouds and little wind. Clear, windless nights are the ones most likely to produce frost. By now many of the plants in your garden have slowed or stopped their growth and some of the area’s trees are already shedding their leaves. Unlike the trees however, most of the vegetables and flowers in your garden are not built to survive Massachusetts’ winters. In fact, most of them will die sometime over the next month or two – probably after the first hard (or killing) frost – when the outside temperature drops to 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

Frost occurs when water in the air becomes cold enough to form ice crystals on the ground and on plants. Sometimes this won’t damage your vegetables. However, when it’s cold enough, the water inside a plant turns into ice and destroys the plant’s structure. Frost damage usually can’t be repaired and the plant usually dies. Warm weather crops like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, melons, and eggplant are the most likely to be damaged first. Other crops like kale, carrots, spinach and cabbage resist frost damage and can even taste better after a frosty night.

In this area, there is a 50% chance that the first killing frost will occur between October 17th and 20th. The best way to beat frost damage is to be alert to weather forecasts in the autumn and then to protect your vegetables as well as you can. If a frost is forecast:

- Check your previous newsletters for storage tips and then harvest as many tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons, squash, basil, etc. as you can – even your green tomatoes can be wrapped individually in newspaper and placed in a cool dark area to ripen slowly (not the refrigerator; it’s too cold).
- Cover your garden with large lightweight pieces of cloth, such as old bed sheets, in the evening before a frost is predicted and take them off the next morning.
- Put a mulch layer of hay over your root crops and leave it there until you are ready to harvest them.