



Growing Celery in Indiana

Celery grows to a height of 18 to 24 inches and is composed of leaf-topped stalks arranged in a cone and joined at a common base. The stalks have a crunchy texture and a delicate, but mildly salty taste. It belongs to the same family as carrots, fennel, parsley and dill. Prized for its stalks, the leaves and roots can also be used for food or seasoning. Celery is a source of important vitamins and minerals and has no calories. It has been reported to reduce blood pressure, support the immune system, and lower cholesterol.

How to Grow

For best growth, celery prefers fertile, well-drained, organic sandy soils with lots of organic matter. Because of its long growing season (120-140 days), celery grows best from transplants. The transplants can be planted in the garden in late April or early May. Space the rows 2 feet apart and the plants 12 inches apart in the row. A tight planting helps to force tall growth and long petioles. Some people blanch (whiten, as with cauliflower) the inner stalks by tying them together with twine.

Good watering is essential to successful celery production. Celery needs at least 1 to 2 inches of water from rainfall or irrigation each week during the growing season. Always soak the soil thoroughly when watering because celery has a small, shallow root system. Any water stress during the year causes the stalks to become stringy and gives them a strong flavor. Celery is crisper and tenderer if watered regularly, especially prior to harvesting. One of the most efficient ways to water celery is to use drip irrigation.

Apply a side dressing of all-purpose granular fertilizer (such as 12-12-12) at the time of planting, at a rate of $\frac{1}{8}$ cup per 4 plants. Celery will need two additional applications of fertilizer to produce optimum yields. The second application should be six weeks after planting, and the third should be four weeks after that.

Problems

Due to celery's slow growth and small root system, it does not compete well with weeds. Frequent, shallow cultivation will control weeds and keep the soil surface loose. The roots of the celery are very close to the surface, so do not cultivate too deeply. Organic mulches will keep weed growth in check and help to retain soil moisture. *Celery is very susceptible to spring and fall frosts, so some protection is advisable.*

Harvest and Storage

Harvest celery stalks by removal of the outer petioles when they are a foot or more in length. Whole plants are ready to use when they are 3 inches or more in diameter. The inner stalks are the most tender and taste the best uncooked. Celery harvested in hot, dry weather may be tough, stringy, and bitter. Often, however, the inner stalks will still be good. Store harvested celery in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Information gathered from "Celery in the Garden," Utah State University Cooperative Extension publication HG/Garden/2006-03pr.