



African Kale from Kenya – Salome



Description of area

Salome comes from a farming region just on the edge of Nairobi. The weather around here is slightly cooler than the rest of the country due to the altitude. The rainy seasons are October – December and March – May.

Background to Salome

Salome comes from a farming background, growing vegetables for local markets, exports and the hotel trade. She now lives in the UK, and has successfully tried a number of Kenyan varieties in her back garden.

“We don’t have any seasons... we use water because our country is warm, it’s not like here where you’ve got winter and summer. So we grow food for the whole year.”

Crops grown in the region

A wide range of crops can be grown including tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, cabbages and fruits such as avocados and citrus fruits. If you have a supply of water, they can be grown all the year round.

“Here I have seen that you [use] cherry tomatoes here but for us they are like wild tomatoes, we don’t use them.”

Growing African Kale in Kenya

African Kale is grown in a many African countries, and is a more perennial, less cultivated version of the kales that we are used to growing here.

“I do cook spinach, kales, beans because I’m able to grow them for myself now and they are doing very well. I’m still intending to bring more plants from back home to try them and see whether they can grow here.”



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Growing and using African Kale in the UK

African kale grows as a perennial and is most easily grown from taking cuttings. It will survive for at least three years if grown as a bush, or it can be grown as a collection of single stem plants for a few months.

How to grow

Crop details: Brassica: cutting. Time to harvest: 15 weeks after planting.

Grow with other brassicas in rotation. Size: Moderate.

Growing timeline: Take cuttings indoors April, Plant out May, Harvest July–October.



Plant

Cuttings can be taken by breaking off branches longer than 5 cm that aren't flowering. Remove all but the top 2 leaves and place 2 cm deep in gritty compost. The cutting will take within a few weeks.

Grow

It is easiest to leave the plant to its own devices and let it grow into a medium size bush. If you want larger leaves, it can be grown as a collection of single stem plants – you will need to regularly remove any side shoot branches. The plants will grow for a few months before becoming too tall to support themselves, after which time, it is best to replace them with new plants taken from cuttings. This method takes more work but produces better quality, larger leaves.

Harvest

Take off the leaves as you need them. It is best to harvest regularly to keep the leaves young, as older leaves will be tougher and not taste so nice.

Cook

Sukuma wiki is a delicious traditional African dish where kale is served in a peanut sauce. Fry 10 medium sized leaves chopped up with some onions and garlic, and blend a dessert spoon of peanut butter with 3 – 4 medium tomatoes, and add to the mixture. Add a little chilli to taste and simmer for 15 minutes.

