

# Tale from the Garden

Broccoli is a green vegetable that vaguely resembles a miniature tree. It belongs to the plant species known as *Brassica oleracea*. Broccoli is an edible green plant in the cabbage family whose large flowering head, stalk and small associated leaves are eaten as a vegetable. It's closely related to cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale and cauliflower — all edible plants collectively referred to as cruciferous vegetables.

Broccoli is known as the **“Jewel in the Crown of Nutrition”** because it is rich in vitamins and minerals.



Your parents knew what was up when they told you to eat your broccoli. This verdant vegetable is a powerhouse of nutrients. It's reputed to benefit digestion, the cardiovascular system and the immune system, and to have anti-inflammatory and even cancer-preventing properties. Plus, broccoli is low in sodium and calories, at about 31 calories per serving. It's also a fat-free vegetable.

## Broccoli facts

- Broccoli was invented by crossing cauliflower seeds with pea seeds.
- Broccoli originated in Italy, grown there since the Roman Empire until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when a royal marriage brought the vegetable to France. According to folklore, Drusus Julius Caesar, son of the Roman emperor Tiberius, was somewhat obsessed with broccoli and, at one point, ate little else for the period of an entire month.
- The word comes from the Latin word "brachium," which means branch or arm, a reflection of the vegetable's tree-like shape.
- The plant came to France in 1560. Until the early 1700s, broccoli was still not widely known in England and was called "sprout colli-flower" or "Italian asparagus."
- Thomas Jefferson was a fan of broccoli and imported broccoli seeds from Italy, planting them at his home, Monticello, as early as May 1767.
- Another president, George H.W. Bush, was *not* a fan. He used his distaste for broccoli as a punch line in dozens of speeches.
- In 2013, President Barack Obama announced that broccoli was his favourite food.
- California produces 90 percent of the broccoli grown in the United States.
- The world record for eating broccoli is held by Tom "Broccoli" Landers. It took him just 92 seconds to eat a full pound of the vegetable! His secret: "Just swallow, don't bother to chew."
- The heaviest broccoli was grown by John and Mary Evans of Palmer, Alaska, USA in 1993, weighing in at 15.87 kg (35 lb)!
- The United States is the world's third largest producer of broccoli, after China & India. China, the top producer, grows over 8 million tons of the vegetable a year.
- Broccoli comes in a variety of colours, ranging from deep sage all the way to dark green & purplish-green.
- Available all year round, broccoli is best from October to May.
- To eliminate the smell of broccoli, add a slice of bread to the pot.
- To retain the nutrients in broccoli, either steam it, stir-fry or boil it in a very small amount of water. Most other methods will cause a nutrient loss of about 25 to 35%.

Have you ever looked at a head of broccoli and wondered what the heck it is, botanically speaking? A miniature tree? Nope.

Its name, "broccoli," gives away the answer. In Italian, "broccoli" means "the flowering crest of a cabbage." Yes, broccoli is a giant floret composed of countless little flowers. If the plant

was left in the ground, the floret would continue maturing and explode into a beautiful abundance of yellow flowers before developing into seeds. (Broccoli flowers are quite tasty too!)

Have you ever bribed your children to eat broccoli? Some children seem to love vegetables from the womb but many do not, and so getting them to eat their broccoli is all about cultivating their taste.

When I was just a wisp of a girl, my mum put cheese on broccoli and cauliflower to get my brother & sister & me to eat it. We absolutely gobbled those veggies down when they were smothered with cheese. We enjoyed them so much that we began to look forward to getting them. After a while, mum began to serve them without cheese - not every time, but sometimes. We grumbled at first, but eventually we admitted they weren't too bad. Over the course of a couple years, the cheese went away, but the veggies remained. To this day we eat our vegetables, and not just because we have to, but because we now love them. My mum patiently, methodically, and lovingly, cultivated and trained our taste for vegetables over time because she knew they were good for us.

My story is not unusual. Parents have been training their children since the dawn of time to do things they would not do if the decision was left to them. That is what parents do for the good of their children. It is called parenting. A small child does not know what is good for him. That is why God gave him parents. If my mum had left me to decide what I would eat for dinner, it might have been Pepsi-Cola and a packet of crisps every night with a slice of chocolate cake for dessert. I don't have to tell you where that would have left me! Raising children to love the right things is the same as getting them to eat their broccoli: it is a matter of training their tastes, or cultivating their affections.

The question now becomes, *what is it that we should want our children to love?*

May I suggest Philippians 4:8 as a fine place to start? There Paul writes, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." In the world of classical Christian education we paraphrase Paul's list as the true, good, and beautiful. Those are the things people ought to love. Those are the things that cause us to flourish.

An example of something both good and beautiful is classical music.

Growing up, I loved The Monkees, a rock & pop band of the 1960/70's. To me their music was amazing, and I still like it with 'Daydream Believer' being a firm favourite. When I was introduced to Bach, I didn't love it immediately. It was like broccoli. But my music teacher pressed the issue and asked me to listen to it occasionally. Over time, the beauty and order present in the music was explained to me. The genius of the composition became apparent. The more I listened and learned, the more the skill required to play it became evident. Over the years, I began to choose Bach over The Monkees at times, and I even began to love it. My affections were trained to love it.

The Monkees are the Pepsi-Cola and crisps, and their songs still have a place in my life. Bach is the broccoli and cauliflower. As those veggies nourish my body, so Bach nourishes both my mind and my soul, but that is a direct result of someone training my affections, someone parenting me. Let me encourage you, all, to train your children's affections for the true, the good, and the beautiful. Man cannot flourish on Pepsi-Cola and Crisps alone! Put cheese on the broccoli and be patient. Train your children to love the right things & they will thrive!