

Raising Plants

Late October or early November is considered the best time to sow brussels sprouts in Otago to produce well-established plants ready for planting out in late December. The more thorough the cultivation of the land on which plants are to be raised the better plants are likely to be. As plants from poorly-prepared seed-beds seldom yield good crops, great care must be taken in the preparation of the ground. Plants do best when sown in beds raised 6 to 8in. above the level of the surrounding land. To provide favourable conditions for the seed the soil is reduced to a very fine tilth. Where the land has been used previously for gardening a dressing of blood and bone and superphosphate is applied at the rate of 6oz. per square yard and lightly hoed into the topsoil. A topdressing of lime, 1lb. per square yard, also helps to keep the soil in good condition and assists in the production of healthy, vigorous, stocky plants.

The seed should be sown thinly and evenly in rows 6in. apart, running north and south. Beds 4ft. wide are considered the most convenient for working, as the operator can weed any part of the bed without tramping on the bed itself. Successive sowings of seed are made when required up to mid-December. Plants are never allowed to remain in the seed-beds until they become root bound or are checked.

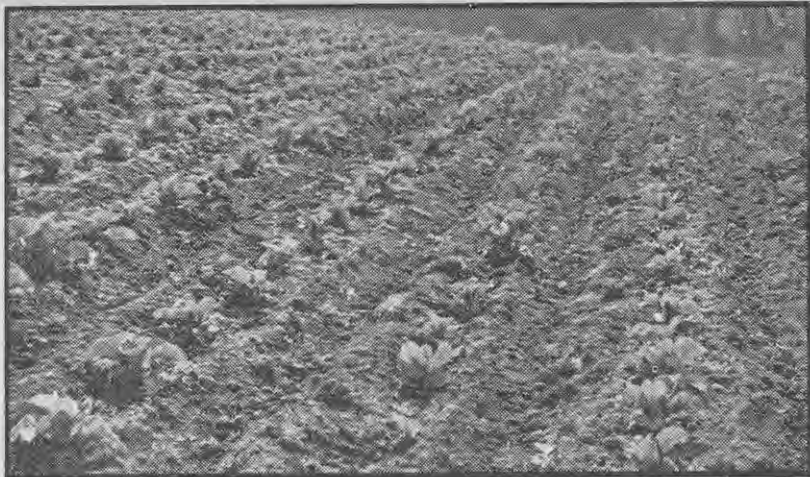
Planting Out

In Otago the planting of the crop extends over a period of 6 to 8 weeks. However, most of the planting is done from mid-December to mid-January, which is considered the best time for starting plants successfully.

Only plants free from disease, with good root formation, and of strong, vigorous appearance are planted out. Care is taken to see that the crown or heart of the plant is not damaged in any way during handling. Transplanting is all done by hand in Otago and where two or more operators are engaged a small garden spade has been found to be the quickest and most satisfactory implement for the work. On one-man units an ordinary garden trowel is quite satisfactory. Correct spacing of plants is important, because brussels sprouts require plenty of room for full development. It is usual to allow 2ft. between plants, with 2ft. 6in. between rows. At this spacing approximately 9000 plants are required to plant an acre.

Plants should be thoroughly watered in the seed-bed several hours before planting in the field. It is preferable to transplant on a cool day, to avoid excessive wilting. Plants are placed in the soil opening prepared either by a trowel or a spade and the soil filled in and pressed firmly around the plant without crushing or disturbing the roots in the ball of soil attached. If this work is carried out when the soil is dry, a good watering to settle the soil round the plants is beneficial. During dry weather the top half of the leaf growth on each outside leaf is removed with a sharp knife to form a balanced condition with the root

BRUSSELS SPROUTS CROP IN OTAGO



Plants growing on ridges running in the direction of the water flow.

system, which may be injured during transplanting.

Management of Growing Crop

Frequent shallow cultivation to keep the soil loose and weeds in check is practised, but deep cultivation, which is likely to disturb the roots of the plants, should be avoided.

Brussels sprouts are perhaps the best of all winter vegetables cultivated in Otago, but are by no means an easy crop to grow. The plants must be given the proper cultural conditions. That is, they must have a uniform moisture supply, there must be adequate available plant food, and they must not receive any check in growth,

particularly during the early growing period. Close, firm sprouts are required, and if the crop is grown in dry soil during hot seasons, the atmosphere tends to make the sprouts open. The number of cultivations necessary depends on weather conditions and the physical condition of the soil, but cultivation should not extend into the early, wet winter months. The surface soil is kept sufficiently loose to absorb and retain moisture and permit free root action and extension in search of food.

The second application of fertiliser, mentioned earlier, is applied by hand close to the plants, 6 to 8 weeks after planting, just before cultivation begins.

A practice strongly advocated by growers is the use of the hoe as soon after rain as possible at every opportunity during the summer. The object is to restore the tilth of the land and to conserve moisture.

Sprouts form on the stems in the axils of the leaves and these leaves should be removed as the sprouts appear. All bottom and decayed leaves should be removed in late autumn so that light and air can reach the plants. The usual procedure is to break the leaves off short by bending them down sharply. The stump of leaf stalk usually left withers and falls, leaving a healed scar.

Harvesting

The harvesting of the crop extends over a considerable portion of the year. In the Oamaru district harvesting commences usually in May. Owing to its proximity to the sea, the climate of the district is more favourable for the earlier development of the sprouts than that of the Taieri district, where harvesting generally begins 2 to 3 weeks later. Harvesting continues right through the season, from May to September and even later in some seasons. Harvesting should not be delayed unduly, but in certain soils, particularly the sandy, well-drained loam of the Taieri Plains, the sprouts remain



Removing the lower leaves.