

Broccoli

Broccoli, the dread of many a young child belongs to a family of unpopular vegetables whose other members include cauliflower, kale, cabbage, collards, turnips and Brussels sprouts. This vegetable family all share the common feature of four-petaled flowers which bear the resemblance to a Greek cross, and explains why they are frequently referred to as crucifers. Broccoli itself was named because it has many strong branches or arms that grow from the main stem, each one sprouting another cluster surrounded by leaves. It was thus named broccoli after the Latin *bracchium*, which means “strong arm”.

Pliny the Elder, a Roman Scholar who lived from 23 to 79 CE, tells us that the Romans both grew and enjoyed broccoli heartily. The vegetable became a standard favorite in Rome where the variety called Calabrese was developed. The Calabrese is the most common variety still eaten in the United States today. Before the Calabrese variety was cultivated, most Romans were eating purple sprouting broccoli that turned green when cooked.

As every child is relentlessly told to little effect, Broccoli is very good for you. In fact, it turns out that Broccoli is a veritable treasure trove of nutrients. Although it may be difficult to believe one cup of cooked broccoli has as much vitamin C as a fresh orange and also provides the vitamin K newborns are injected with, which is important for building strong bones and to help blood coagulate. Although a bit on the bitter, broccoli leaves are also edible and contain large amounts of vitamin A, which is important for the health of liver, bone and vision. Broccoli's wealth of the trace mineral, chromium, may be effective in preventing adult-onset diabetes in some people. Chromium and foods rich in it naturally is used by naturopaths to help reduce sugar cravings in people in the grips of full blown choc-aholia.

The National Cancer Institute of America suggests that broccoli, along with its cruciferous family members, may be important in the prevention of some types of cancer. The list of these types is quite impressive and includes prostate cancer, breast cancer, and through its ability to repair UV damage to the skin, perhaps most importantly of all for Australians, skin cancer. Research has also suggested that Broccoli may be useful in reducing blood pressure, especially when eaten with tomatoes. A tasty serving of Broccoli and garlic sauce would also provide a powerful medicine for anyone suffering from dangerously high blood pressure. An American group have even made a flower essence out of Broccoli, similar to Dr Bach's rescue remedy. According to the group, this essence allows women to grow up and take responsibility for themselves.

According to Wikipedia, in 1928, when broccoli was still something of a novelty in the United States, a cartoon appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine. A mother and child are seated at the table, and the mother says, "It's broccoli, dear." The child replies, "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it." Don't let this discourage all you parents out there however, sooner all later we all grow to appreciate this “strong arm” of the vegetable empire!

The Barefoot Doctor