

Roselle Culture

Hibiscus sabdariffa



Southern Exposure
Seed Exchange
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Roselle is a short day plant and photo periodic usually grown tropical and subtropical areas. In the US it has been grown commercially in Florida, California, Louisiana and Kentucky. Many home gardeners are growing Roselle successfully as a warm weather annual in Oklahoma, New Jersey and even further North.

In temperate zones Roselle should be started in pots at the same time as tomatoes. When seedlings are 3 to 4 inches high transplant to a sunny place in the garden. Space plants 3ft apart in rows 5ft apart. Roselle appreciates a soil with high organic matter levels but too much nitrogen will delay flowering until too late in the season. Keep plants unmulched, evenly moist and well weeded until they are 1 ½ to 2 ft high. At that point we mulch the plants and have few weeds for the rest of the season.

Early tip pruning and the formation of more flowering branches. The small leaves and tender branch tips are a refreshing addition to fresh salads. You can also use them to make a tea or jam very much like the ones from the calyxes. You don't need to add pectin because Roselle leaves contain 3% pectin. Remember that Roselle tea needs to be boiled to get the deep red color and great flavor.

On our Central Virginia Farm flowering of our preferred Thai Red Roselle variety begins in late July to mid August continuing until frost. We cover plants with reemay or tarps during early light frosts to keep the harvest going well into October.

The Roselle calyxes are most easily harvested when fully grown but still tender. At this stage they can be snapped off by hand. Use clippers to harvest stem that have hardened. A second advantage of harvesting early and often is increased total production of calyxes. Although picking a variety with less day length sensitivity might be the most important factor affecting yield in temperate areas.

Calyx production for us use has ranged from 1 to 2lbs per plant (less is you are waiting for the lower fruits to mature seeds before beginning the harvest, more is harvesting while the calyx stems are still tender).

It takes 10 to 12 lbs of fresh calyxes to make 1 lb of dried calyx for tea.

For a home gardener all this means that 3 to 6 well spaced plants would produce ½ lb of dried calyxes as well as lots of refreshing tea and delicious salad additions from young leaves and stem tips all summer.