



Yellow Broccoli, Yummy!

This week we'll harvest the first yellow broccoli in our garden.

Rick Gush

Friday, February 26, 2010

Photo by Rick Gush This week we'll harvest the first yellow broccoli in our garden. This is a fairly unusual vegetable and seems to be grown mostly here in Liguria.

This variety is not the similarly chartreuse-colored Romanesco broccoli that has more angular bumps nor is it the broccoli-cauliflower cross called broccaflower, which is the same bright color but with cauliflower style flesh.

This plant we are growing is a regular broccoli, called Broccolo di Albenga. It first came from the river valley near Albenga, which is the largest flat area in Liguria. Ha! The whole river valley plain near Albenga is less than 40 square miles, but here in Liguria, that's an enormous, flat area.

There is also a purple broccoli, but that's mostly grown in the south, like Sicily. I must note that there is a fair amount of inaccurate information on the web, and I never found a non-Italian site that mentioned Broccolo di Albenga. I did find a number of sites that called broccaflower and Romanesco broccoli the same thing, which is obviously not true.

Broccoli is considered to have been grown first in Italy and the Romans were eating broccoli way before anybody in Europe or Asia discovered this vegetable.

Italians have a tendency to spread their crops wherever they travel, and it was Italian growers in California in the early twentieth century who led the way in introducing this vegetable to American menus.

Photo by Rick Gush

In the Italian language, "brocco" means sprout, and broccoli means a bunch of little branches. The cultivated plant was developed from wild mustard plants. I eat a whole lot of wild mustard buds when I'm out hiking, and it is one of my favorite wild foods.

Broccoli rabe, or rabe, is actually a type of turnip, and is pretty similar to the wild mustard buds. Rabe is a common offering in the vegetable markets here.

Actually, everything is not perfect in the broccoli patch. I had thought I had bought regular broccoli for some of these plants that turned out to be yellow broccoli.

In addition, the plants aren't growing as large as I would have liked, and are mostly small and only about half the desired size. I didn't plant in August like some of my neighbors, but waited until October.

It's also been a notably cold and cloudy winter, so the plants haven't had as much sunshine as usual. We'll eat the first big buds now and then harvest several more crops of the secondary shoots that will keep coming for several months.

The bottom line is that this yellow broccoli is great steamed, in casseroles, in soups and most optimally in pasta dishes. My wife makes a pasta with a soft stracchino cheese, broccoli, pasta and a few walnuts. A really superb dish, and I think that's what we're having for lunch today! Yummy!

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