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When to cut

Two official crops, two official cutting rules, both taken while the buds are still tight.

The Royal Horticultural Society's advice is to cut before the flowers open. Encyclopaedia Britannica says what happens if you wait: the buds "bear yellow flowers with four petals and produce silique fruits (a dry capsule)."

The official crop	When to cut, in official wording
Calabrese, the large head	Ready to cut when "10–15cm (4–6in) across, well formed but still in bud." The same official page also says to harvest "when large and firm but still tightly in bud," and describes heads "about 15cm (6in) across." After the main head, side-shoots extend the harvest "for up to eight weeks," and later on the same page "for up to a couple of months."
Sprouting broccoli	Spears "well formed but still tightly in bud." "Harvest the whole shoot, about 10cm (4in) long, as the stem and leaves are edible too." "The more shoots you harvest, the more the plants will produce." Repeated harvests "for up to two months."
If left unharvested	Encyclopaedia Britannica: the buds "bear yellow flowers with four petals and produce silique fruits (a dry capsule)."
A colour in the pan	The broccoli guide: "Purple varieties generally turn green when cooked." Broccoli "is best used as fresh as possible, but can be kept in the fridge for a few days and freezes well."

A short quiz

1. How long a sprouting shoot does the broccoli guide tell you to take?
2. What official size is given for a calabrese head that is ready to cut?
3. What, officially, do purple varieties generally do when cooked?

Answers. About 10cm (4in) of stem, leaves and all. 10–15cm (4–6in) across, still in bud. They generally turn green.

Wording from the Royal Horticultural Society growing guides and Encyclopaedia Britannica, "broccoli," re-checked 18 November 2026. broccoli.vegetables.im is independent of both. Typographic sheet: no photographs inside.