

Hayefield

A Pennsylvania Plant Geek's Garden

Spigariello

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When I read seed-catalog descriptions that tell me a plant “tastes just like [fill in the blank]”, I have to wonder, well, why don't I just grow the original plant, rather than the taste-alike? Sometimes, it seems like the substitute might be the easier route, but we all know how shortcuts often have a way of turning out to be disappointing, to say the least. If I'd put some effort into getting a good bed of real asparagus going last year, for instance, I'd probably be able to harvest a few stalks this spring, and they'd really *be* asparagus. Instead, I went for the seemingly simpler route of growing [asparagus peas](#) and spent months waiting for hardly a mouthful of pods that weren't all that asparagus-like anyway.



I've made similarly poor plant choices before, so you'd think I'd know better. And yet, I fell for the “tastes just like” line a second time last year, with a plant called spigariello, or Italian leaf broccoli, from [Underwood Gardens](#). Last year was also my first year for real broccoli, and I had my doubts about how it would do, so I thought maybe the spigariello would make a good backup. Well, the broccoli turned out great and kept producing sideshoots through the summer, so I didn't pay much attention to the spigariello until early fall, by which time the broccoli was too wormy to harvest anymore.

By early September, the five spigariello plants I'd started indoors in late March and set out in early May were about 3 feet tall, and they looked rather more like kale than broccoli plants. But they sure did have lots of leaves, in a beautiful powdery blue and in a variety of textures: Some were tightly crimped and others were smoother and broader. Most importantly, none of them were bothered by the cabbage worms, so I figured it was time to try them.

I clipped off a handful of the most tender, small new leaves, and Mom and I tried them in our salads. And wonder of wonders: They actually *did* taste like broccoli! I can't speak to how they'd be cooked, but I do know that they made a great fresh broccoli substitute into December, and at least one of the plants may even have survived the winter. I have plenty of real broccoli already started for this year, but I think I will sow more spigariello too, since it's handsome enough to be ornamental as well as edible. Now, if I could just find something as easy to grow with a “tastes-like” flavor more interesting than broccoli....

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