



# Shetland cabbage



**Location:** the Shetland islands, north of Scotland



**Taxonomy:** *Brassica oleracea* L.

**Main actors:** a core of dedicated Shetland cabbage growers; local initiatives to document, protect and promote local crops; Science Advice for Scottish Agriculture ([SASA](#)) in Edinburgh supporting *in situ* genetic diversity.



**Information:** Maria Scholten [Maria.Anna.Scholten@sac.ac.uk](mailto:Maria.Anna.Scholten@sac.ac.uk)

SAC Scottish Agricultural College Crop and Soil Research - West Mains Rd EH9 3JG Edinburgh





**Shetland cabbage**, a landrace of unknown origin, has been grown on the Shetland Islands at least since the 17th century. First used as a vegetable, in later centuries it was widely grown as winterfeed for cattle and sheep. In the last decades it has become a very rare crop.

Traditionally **plantie crubs** were used (Fenton 1978), small stone-walled enclosures for raising cabbages as shown above left picture. Herring nets functioned as windbreak and to keep birds out. The young seedlings were then transplanted to larger **kale yards**, often also with stone walls. Many of these stonewalled structures have been abandoned or are used for other purposes. These remains of cabbage cultivation can be seen all over the islands.



Shetland Cabbage has been used in **disease resistance** trials because of the clubroot resistance of some of the accessions. Some workers reported the typical blue-green color and a weak head-forming habit.

Shetland Cabbage **characterisation** at SASA in Edinburgh started in 2007 on 13 accessions representing the Shetland mainland and the islands Foula, Yell and Whalsay. Visual assessment and preliminary analysis show wide variation within and between accessions in morphology and agronomic traits such as heading habit and powdery mildew resistance. None of the plants showed signs of clubroot infection.



Shetland cabbage has been in decline for a long time. Shetland cabbage seed had been collected in the 1980's and deposited at the vegetable genebank at Warwick HRI in Wellesbourne. These accessions were screened for resistance to Clubroot (*Plasmodiophora brassicae*) (Crute & Pink 1989).

In 2006 an assessment of Shetland Cabbage cultivation was undertaken by the University of Birmingham because there were indications of a severe threat. Seed was collected and conserved at SASA.

The **Scottish Landraces Protection Scheme** was set up in 2006 to protect/conserve seed of Shetland Cabbage landraces in *ex situ* collections for local growers.

The Scheme supports *in situ* conservation by:

1. Establishing a network of Shetland Cabbage seed donors;
2. Building *ex situ* safety duplication with the provision that growers can have their own seed back in case of a seed crop failure;
3. Providing information to growers about germination, diseases and husbandry;
4. Acknowledging the existence and importance of Scottish landraces and the work of Shetland cabbage growers.

Information can be obtained with Niall Green [Niall.Green@sasa.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Niall.Green@sasa.gsi.gov.uk)



## Shetland cabbage local initiatives



Shetland cabbage, Shetland oats, bere barley and rare breeds such as Shetland ducks, cows and sheep are actively preserved on the heritage demonstration farm [Burland Croft trail](#);

The [Shetland Organic Producers Group](#) has a project with heritage crops such as bere and Shetland oats; members also grow Shetland cabbage;

[Bressay Heritage Group](#) has documented Shetland cabbage cultivation history on the island of Bressay where it was extensively cultivated in the last century; Community Biodiversity Action Plans such as for the island of Yell have drawn special attention to Shetland crops such as Shetland kale

**Shetland Cabbage as an ongoing local tradition is maintained by a small group of Shetland cabbage growers and plantie crab enthusiasts.**



### References:

- Anderson, L.F. 2001 The Bressay Plantie Crubs. Bressay Local History Group, Bressay
- Crute, I.R. and Pink, D.A.C. 1989 The characteristics and inheritance of resistance to clubroot in *Brassica oleracea*. Aspects of Applied Biology 23: 57-60
- Fenton, A. 1978 The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland. John Donald Publishers Ltd.
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