

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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EXTEND THE GARDENING SEASON WITH A FALL GARDEN

Fall vegetable gardening time is officially here. The fall garden season is often overlooked in garden planning, but if your year has been like mine, this is a much needed chance at reclaiming what the summer heat has hindered.

Actually, many garden crops do better in the fall. Many cole crops don't do well in spring because as temperatures rise they immediately go to seed and quit producing. By planting these crops at the end of the summer, they can get off to a quick start while young, and then as the temperatures cool down the plants reach maturity and produce high quality crops. Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, turnips, and kale can handle fairly low temperatures-even to 25 degrees F., and this extends the growing season deep into the fall.

Many leaf and root crops are good candidates for fall gardening. They grow and mature quickly. It is a good idea to plant more seeds than you would in the spring since there will be no opportunity to replant if germination is poor.

.Direct seeding is often successful but there must be a consistent supply of water since temperatures are still high. If consistent watering is a problem during the germination and establishment time, consider growing transplants in the house and moving them into the garden after careful hardening off.

What to Do

To prepare your garden for a fall crop, remove any old crop residues and weeds. Till or spade at least 6-8 inches deep. You may need to incorporate a low analysis all purpose garden fertilizer if the soil has been heavily used to grow other crops this summer. One to two pounds of fertilizer per 100 square feet is sufficient. Be sure to thoroughly mix the fertilizer with the soil.

Soils may form a hard crust over the seeds, which can interfere with the emergence of tiny seedlings, particularly in heavy soils. Use a light mulch of vermiculite, compost or peat moss over the seed row to prevent a crust from forming.

Many people wonder if they should add compost into the soil as they till for the fall garden, but the truth is that it is better to wait. Too much tilling during late summer can dry out the soil and make it more difficult to germinate seeds. Adding and tilling in compost is better left for the end of the gardening year.

Some seeds don't germinate well in warm soils. Seeds of lettuce, peas and spinach may need to be shaded by using a light mulch over the seed row. This will help keep the temperature more favorable for germination. Planting the seeds slightly deeper than in spring is also beneficial since soil temperatures will be slightly cooler and moisture more available.

Good fall garden crops include: snap beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, carrots, collards, cauliflower, cucumber (bush type), kale, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce, bibb lettuce, endive, mustard, potato, radish, spinach, Swiss chard, summer squash, turnips.

Crops not suited to fall gardens include: lima beans, eggplant, melons, peppers, okra, salsify, sweet potatoes, sweet corn and tomatoes.