

August 6, 2022

Thinking of a Fall Vegetable Garden

How are your vegetable gardens doing? The Nye household garden has been semi-successful. Certain plants have done tremendous and others not so well. We do not plant a big garden but we try to have some of the standards like tomato, cucumber, peppers, squash, melons etc.

Right now, the plants that have done well are loaded with produce for our enjoyment. We may still need to rely on the local farmer's markets to fill in the gaps but that is okay.

With the extreme heat and humidity, I am sure many of you are thinking about the upcoming cooler days of fall, but have you given any thought to a fall garden?

Many vegetables that are planted in early spring, can also be planted in August for a fall crop. We safely use October 15th as our date for our first frost of the fall. So, if we use that as a target, we have roughly 70 days yet to grow a fall garden. Utilization of row covers may extend that even more and possibly allow us to grow a fall vegetable garden into November.

If you can find seedlings to plant here soon, we can gain about 10 to 12 days for plants to reach maturity. If not, we will have to rely on planting seeds and checking seed packets of our vegetable selections for days to maturity. This would be the approximate number of days from planting the seed to when a crop would be ready for harvest.

Early in August, there are enough days to plant bush beans, carrots, or beets to harvest before frost. Other vegetables that mature quickly like lettuce or spinach can be planted in succession beginning now or planted later in the month as can cold tolerant vegetables like mustard, turnips, broccoli, radishes, and kohlrabi.

The following site at Purdue Extension has a great chart with latest feasible planting dates for many of our favorite vegetables; <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/HO/HO-66-W.pdf> Be certain to prepare the garden bed by removing any debris from an earlier crop and removing weeds. Then till the soil and add organic matter and/or fertilizer. Late summer plantings often suffer from hot soil and a lack of water. Soils may form a hard crust over the seeds which can interfere with seed germination, particularly in heavy soils. Use a light mulch of compost, or potting soil over the seed row to prevent a crust from forming. Seeds of lettuce, peas, and spinach will not germinate well when the soil temperature is 85°F and above. Shading the soil and using a light mulch over the seed row will help keep the temperature more favorable for germination. Planting the seeds slightly deeper than spring plantings may also be beneficial since temperatures will be slightly cooler. Do not allow seedlings and young transplants to dry out excessively. Apply one inch of water in a single application each week to thoroughly moisten the soil. Young seedlings may need to be watered more often during the first week or two of growth. Young transplants may benefit from light shade for the first few days until their new roots become established.

If we have a summer garden growing, remember that some vegetables already growing in the garden will continue to produce well into the fall, but may be damaged by even a light frost. Some crops are considered semi-hardy and will withstand a light frost without protection. Others are hardy enough to withstand several hard frosts. You can extend the fall growing season for tender crops by protecting them through early light frosts.

Often, we can enjoy several more weeks of good growing weather after the first frost. When frost is a threat, cover growing beds with blankets or throw cloths supported by stakes or wire to prevent mechanical injury to the plants. Individual plants can be protected with such items as

paper caps, milk jugs, and other commercially available row cover products. The season can be extended even further by planting crops in a cold frame or hotbed. For next year, keep the fall garden in mind while planning and ordering your spring garden seeds and plants. Seeds of the cultivars you want may be out of stock by late summer. You may need to raise your own transplants; not all garden centers carry vegetable plants for fall gardens. Here's to anticipation of cooler days and a wonderful fall harvest.



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