

# Fall Gardening



## A Second Chance for a Harvest

So – maybe you didn’t get a chance to get your early spring crops planted because of all the rain or maybe you did get them planted but they rotted or got overtaken by weeds because of all the rain. Fortunately, there is a second chance. Most of the cool season vegetables may be planted again (in late summer) for harvesting in the fall. Green beans and summer squash can also be planted for a fall crop. The main planting season for all fall crops is from July 20 through the month of August. Please consult the fall planting calendar for the best planting dates for the individual crops. Successful fall gardening requires the reversal of some of our normal spring vegetable gardening practices. Since planting time for the fall garden is late July through August, a killing frost is not usually a threat. Rather, your garden is faced with high heat and drying winds during the time of plant establishment. Therefore, you have to nurse your plants through the hot weather until cooler days of autumn bring some relief. Successful fall gardening hinges on five general practices; mulching, watering, plant selection and placement, pest control, and perhaps most important, time of planting.

## MULCHING

In the spring it is important to give plants every chance to grow in a warm soil. Thus, we may use raised beds or plastic mulch to foster these conditions. As the weather warms and rains become more sporadic, garden plants benefit greatly from an organic mulch such as straw, compost, leaf mulch or grass clippings. Thus mulch acts as a temperature and moisture buffer for the soil, moderating the extremes of these elements in the root-zone. Using mulch is an important way to coax your young fall transplants or direct-seeding, mulch them gradually so they are not covered by the mulch as it is blown around by the wind. Make your mulch as deep as the first leaf of the plant as your crop is getting established. As the plants get bigger, increase the depth of the mulch until it keeps weeds subdued and the soil damp.

## WATERING

As critical as mulching is the method of watering your young seedlings. Before seedling emergence, your newly planted seeds require a moist soil. They need plenty of water for germination and emergence. The water requirement will best be met through frequent light waterings. When the seedlings have developed several true leaves, the frequency of watering should be tapered off. However, the amount of water should not be decreased; rather the actual amount of water per week may increase up to 1.5”. The best way to get water to your plants is with a soaker hose, drip irrigation, or some other method that wets the soil gently. If you cannot use one of the above methods, or feel the primal urge to spray water on your garden, then spray early in the morning using a fine mist. Harsh splattering of water on the soil surface will cause crusting of the soil surface when it dries and seedlings will not be able to push up through it. Just remember that mellow watering fosters a mellow soil surface. Avoid frequent light waterings after the seedlings have established themselves. Normally your garden needs 1” to 1.5” of water per week in the summer. Try to apply this at one time if possible. This encourages deeper root growth which in turn makes the plant hardier and more drought resistant. A final point on watering is that natural rainfall should not be relied on to provide the water for your garden. You may get lucky and have consistent, sufficient rainfall, but you will most likely not get rainfall at the proper time and the plant’s growth will not be optimal.

## PLANT PLACEMENT AND SELECTION

It is critical that the fall gardener choose the correct plants for the garden. It is of no use to plant a long-season, hot weather loving plant, like okra, in late July and expect a crop worth mentioning. The same applies to melons, sweet corn, winter squash, etc. Therefore, confine your crop choices to the shorter season, spring crops, such as the cabbage family (cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, kale, etc.) greens and onions. These crops are well-proven for fall gardeners in this area. You may try peas, summer squash, green beans and even some short-season corn with varying success. You may end up with a great harvest if the weather is right and the frost is not early. Whatever you decide to plant for the fall, make sure you do not

plant it in the same place you planted in the spring. This reduces the risk of a disease that the spring crop had being passed on to the fall crop. Since vegetables are not all in the same family, they are susceptible and immune to different diseases and pests. Therefore, plant you beans where you had your cabbage, your spinach where you had your potatoes, you cabbage where you had your early sweet corn, and so on. Also, keep in mind that the days will be getting shorter and the angle of the sun will be decreasing. That means the parts of your garden that gets full sunlight in June may get considerably less in September as the sun moves into the southern part of the day.

## PEST CONTROL

The most important factor in disease and pest control is the health and vigor of the crop. If you garden soil is fertile, your vegetable plants are not suffering from drought stress and have plenty of light, most vegetables will thrive. However, there will always be disease and pests. For many people, the issue of spraying insecticides and fungicides is divisive. However, the majority of gardeners do use these on occasion. A good compromise is to use botanical insecticides. Pyrethrum, Sabadilla dust and Bacillus thuringiensis (BT), a bacterial toxin that affects the larvae of various kinds of moths. These insecticides are quite effective and are completely safe. And they are available at the Kansas City Community Gardens office and at most garden centers where information specific to the pest and its control can be found. Normally, a spray schedule of once every week or ten days is recommended to keep insect damage at a minimum. If the weather of late summer and early fall is hot and dry, you should not encounter many disease problems. Fungal disease can thrive in a cooler, wet environment, which can prevail around harvest time for fall vegetables. The problem with controlling fungal diseases, such as anthracnose and various mildews is that once you see it, it is too late to save the affected area. Therefore, a preventative spray schedule is even more important for disease control. Regarding spraying for fungal disease, it should be stressed that very few gardeners in this area lose their crops as a result of disease. Most gardeners do not use fungicides and do not have significant disease problems. Home-made sprays of baking soda in water have been shown to be very effective for a number of fungal diseases.

## TIMING OF PLANTING

As you all know, there are some proper times for planting all vegetables. Some vegetables are more flexible in their requirements than others. Below is a list of commonly planted fall vegetables and their recommended planting dates for a fall crop. If a vegetable is not listed, then it is not considered a good candidate for a successful fall crop. Unless otherwise indicated, vegetables listed should be direct-seeded in the garden

Arugula	8/1-8/20	Onion, for green onions (sets)	8/1-9/15
Bean, Bush	7/25-8/10	Pea, Snap (short vine)	8/1-8/10
Beet	8/1-8/10	Radish	8/1-8/25
Broccoli (plants)	7/25-8/5	Spinach	8/1-8/20
Cabbage (plants)	7/20-8/5	Squash, Summer	7/1-7/31
Carrot	7/20-8/5	Swiss Chard	7/25-8/20
Cauliflower (plants)	7/20-8/5	Tatsoi	7/25-8/20
Collards (seeds or plants)	7/25-8/20	Turnip	7/20-8/15
Garlic (bulbs)	11/15-12/15		
Kale (seeds or plants)	7/25-8/20	Herbs:	
Kohlrabi	7/25-8/15	Cilantro/Coriander (seeds or plants)	8/15-9/15
Lettuce, Head (seeds or plants)	8/1-8/20		
Lettuce, Leaf (seeds or plants)	8/1-8/20		
Mustard Greens	8/1-8/30		

Fall gardening is an enjoyable, though sometimes, challenging way to extend your gardening seasons. Remember the five practices upon which the success of your fall garden depends, mulching, watering, plant selection and placement, pest management and control, and timing of planting. Please feel free to contact the Kansas City Community Gardens office with your garden questions or comments.