

Vegetable Gardening in Fall

A Garden Guide

Your fall veggie garden will allow you to continue harvesting fresh food when many of the warmer weather vegetables are finished. Some vegetables even have superior flavor in the fall, such as collard greens, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, and leafy greens. Lettuce, spinach and arugula perform better in cooler weather.



Your harvest season can be extended even further, sometimes through winter, by providing protection for your plants. Figure your planting date by subtracting the number of days needed for plant maturity from the frost date.

Preparing Your Garden Beds

- Remove spent crop residues and weeds.
- Diseased crop residues should not be added to your compost pile.
- Avoid adding weed seeds to your compost pile unless you are sure your compost pile heats up long enough to kill them.
- If you applied a lot of fertilizer in spring, you may not need more, but this is an excellent time to incorporate compost.
- Till or spade the planting area to a depth of at least 6-8".

Planting Seeds & Transplants

- Direct seeding is recommended for peas and root crops ~ make sure plants have time to mature before frost.
- Be prepared to water seedlings daily at first. Young seedlings dry out quickly.
- Plant fall seeds a little deeper than spring seeds (1 ½-2 times deeper) because the soil is warm and potentially dry.
- Lettuce and spinach will not germinate if temperatures exceed 85 degrees. Start these seeds in a cool shady spot and move them into full sun as soon as they germinate to prevent plant legginess.
- Garlic is planted in fall around mid-October to mid-November. Pull the garlic bulb apart into individual cloves. Plant only the largest cloves and eat the rest.

- **Transplants** are not as delicate as seedlings, plus they require no garden space until they are transplanted into the garden. Young transplants will still require watchful watering.

- These plants may do better if transplanted (rather than direct seeded): Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Cabbage, and Cauliflower.

Direct seed *or* transplant Collards, Kale, Leek, Lettuce, Mustard, Onion, and Swiss chard. Use transplants if you are getting a late start. You can grow transplants in trays outside the garden while your summer garden continues to produce, maximizing use of garden space.



Water

- Plants will need 1" of water per week, best all at one time so deep roots develop. Seedlings and transplants will need more frequent watering (sometimes daily).

Fertilizer

- Soil tests are FREE most of the year through NC Cooperative Extension! Ask us for soil test boxes.
- Fall fertilizer applications depend on the amount of fertilizer applied in springtime.
- Great time to add finished compost to the fall garden area.
- Can add raw manure now to areas that will not be planted until spring. Note that uncomposted manure often contains many weed seeds.
- If you have not limed the garden soil in several years, 50# of lime per 1000 sq. ft. can be added safely.
- Adding a side-dressing of fertilizer in 3-6 weeks is beneficial.

INSECTS & DISEASES

- There will be more pressure from insects and diseases in the fall because insect populations are high and diseases have arrived. Cole crops (cabbage, broccoli, leafy greens, etc.) are especially susceptible to damage from cabbage worms.
- Bt is an organic solution that targets soft-bodied caterpillars (like cabbage worms).
- Sluggo is an effective organic solution for slugs and snails.
- Encourage beneficial insects. Plant beneficial insect plants like bronze fennel, yarrow, and other umbrals (umbrella-shaped blooms) near the perimeter of your garden.
- Consider hand-picking insects from plants. Squash them or drop them in a jar of soapy water.

- Learn to differentiate good bugs from bad bugs.
- **Prevention!** Keep plants healthy and actively growing. Avoid stressing them out by either lack of space, lack of water, or lack of nutrients. Be observant and scout for insects/diseases frequently.

Frost Protection

- If you protect plants from the first frost (usually around Oct. 10, sometimes earlier), oftentimes it will not frost again for several weeks thus extending your growing/harvest window.
- Protect single plants with milk jugs, paper bags or cardboard boxes, or walls o' water. Remove boxes or bags early the next day. **Do not use sheet plastic.**
- Use floating row cover or burlap over arches of #9 wire, fiberglass rods, PVC pipe, or stakes. Keep cloth from touching plants or that area will be frost damaged.
- Some plants require very little protection, such as: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, Asian greens, carrots, collards, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, onions, radishes, diakon, spinach, and turnips. Additional protection may be necessary during winter months.

Harvest

- Harvest root crops prior to a hard freeze or mulch heavily. Some root crops can sometimes be harvested through winter and into spring. Sweet potatoes **MUST** be harvested prior to frost.
- Lettuce (that is protected with floating row cover) can freeze solid and survive beautifully, **BUT** wait until it is completely thawed out before harvesting, usually around 11 a.m.
- Cabbage can be pulled up, root and all, and stored outdoors for later use. **Old-timer method:** Dig a nice hole and line with straw. Put cabbage in the hole root side up and cover with straw and soil. Pull cabbage out by the root when you are ready to use it.
- Harvest early in the morning when plants have been cooled naturally by nighttime temps.
- Harvest veggies when young and tender. Harvest the outer leaves of collards and kale, letting the baby inner leaves continue growing. Once the weather is very cold, growth slows or stops.
- After you harvest the broccoli crown, side shoots will develop for another smaller harvest.
- Store diseased items separate from disease-free items. Eat the diseased ones first since they will spoil sooner.

