

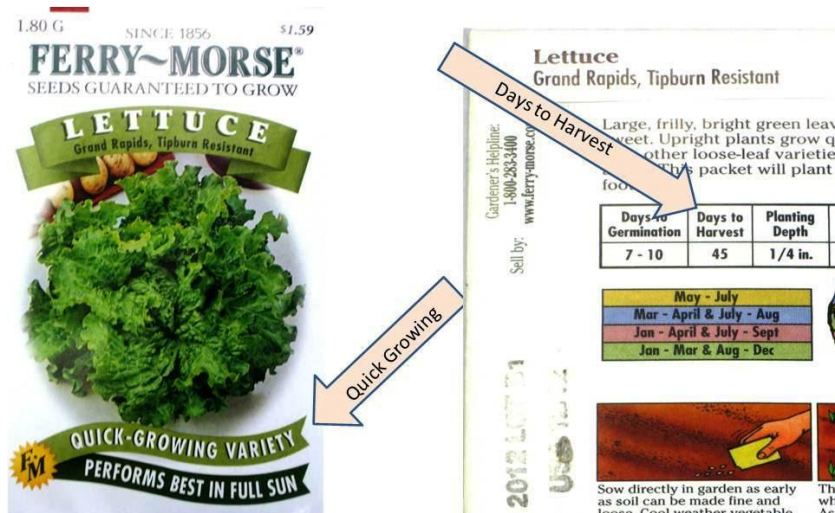
I've noticed that for most gardeners, enthusiasm flourishes in early spring but gradually fades as autumn approaches. As spring arrives, gardeners can hardly wait for the weather to stabilize. They are anxious to head outdoors and begin gardening. For some, it even becomes a contest to see who can have the first garden for the season. After the spring planting, gardeners remain excited as they await the first harvest. Within weeks radishes, lettuce, spinach, and other early, cool-season crops are ready to pick. But, as we all know, time continues to advance. As summer approaches and spring vanishes, so also do most of the early, cool-season crops. Even so, enthusiasm remains relatively strong. Once warmer weather arrives, gardeners anticipate their first ripe tomato, freshly picked green beans or the taste of home grown potatoes. Spring becomes summer, and summer gives way to fall. With the vanishing seasons, so does a gardener's enthusiasm wane.

If such a description fits you, I offer a solution to regenerate that enthusiasm. Why not consider fall gardening?

Fall gardening extends the growing season. Cooler temperatures — hopefully with returning added moisture — creates the opportune time to plant an assortment of vegetable crops. With soil temperatures warm and evening air temperatures

cooler, it's an ideal time for planting a variety of cool-season crops similar to those we grew in early spring.

Pay Attention to Seed Packet



Before planting a fall garden, you should know the average days to harvest for each vegetable you plan to plant. The seed packet usually discloses that valuable information. For example, leaf lettuce is

generally ready to harvest about forty days after planting; whereas, peas can take up to sixty days. Consider using quickly maturing cultivars wherever possible to

ensure a harvest before a killing frost occurs. According to the Farmer's Almanac, the Kearney area's first expected frost date is October 8. Notice I wrote expected. We should all know there are no guarantees when it comes to the whims of Mother Nature.

Frost is often classified as being light, moderate to hard, or severe. A light freeze occurs when temperatures reach 29 °F to 32°F. A light frost will kill most tender plants but has little effect on other vegetation. A moderate to hard frost is described as temperatures ranging from 25°F to 28°F. A frost of this type is widely destructive to most vegetation with heavy damage to semi-hardy plants. A severe freeze, one that kills or damages most plants, is when temperatures reach 24°F or colder,

Some vegetable crops are capable of withstanding a light frost without protection, while others are hardy enough to withstand several hard frosts. Listed below are some of the more common vegetables according to their frost tolerance.

- ✓ Tender vegetables include beans, cucumber, eggplant, pepper, squash, sweet corn, tomato and watermelon.
- ✓ Semi-hardy vegetables include beets, carrots, lettuce, parsnip and potato.
- ✓ Those vegetables deemed hardy and capable of withstanding several hard frosts include broccoli, cabbage, spinach, kale, onion, peas and radish.

Before planting a fall garden, remove all previous crop residues and weed vegetation. Prepare the soil by tilling six to eight inches deep. Plant seeds according to the directions on the seed packet. After planting, water the area lightly and keep soil moist to aid germination. After plants emerge, one may need to thin seedlings to avoid overcrowding. Continue to water if it doesn't rain by applying a minimum of one inch of water per week. Keep area weed free and with a certain amount of skill and a little good fortune, you will find yourself harvesting a new crop before Jack Frost arrives. Be prepared to provide protection, such as covering plants with blankets etc., in the event of an early frost,

Although spring vanished a long time ago and with it perhaps some of your enthusiasm, why not plant a fall garden and keep that enthusiasm alive?