



Fall Vegetable Gardening

While mid-August might not seem like the ideal time to plant a garden, it actually can be. Fall vegetable gardening can be a great way to get more mileage from your garden. Many vegetables grow well in the cooler fall temperatures, and some can withstand hard frosts.

Many of the cool season vegetables commonly seen and planted in early spring are just as successful grown in the fall. Bibb and leaf lettuces, spinach, Swiss chard, and green onions are a few examples of these. All can take a few light frosts, and cooler temperatures will often sweeten the taste. Broccoli, cauliflower, turnips, kale and carrots are other cool season crops, but these can take hard frosts. Many fall vegetable growers even leave root crops in the ground and harvest them as needed. If you choose to do that, mulch the area well to keep the soil around the vegetables from freezing.

When deciding when to plant, a little bit of math comes in handy. If you're planting from seed, packets will have a 'days to maturity' or 'days to harvest' listed on the back. For example, I have some carrot seeds of the 'Napoli' variety. The packet tells me the seeds need 58 days to maturity. To this 58, I need to add 14 additional days to take into account vegetables grow slightly slower in the cooler temperatures. That gives me 72 days, so if I plant on August 20th, I could expect to harvest carrots around November 1st. Carrots can tolerate frost, so such a late harvest would be ok. In eastern Nebraska, we can start expecting our first frost around October 10th.

If you choose to grow something else that would be killed by frost such as sweet corn, you will have to plan on harvesting your crop at least two weeks before the first frost. To calculate planting date for frost sensitive plants, work backwards – my green bean 'Provider' has a maturity period of 50 days. Just for ease of calculating, let's say I want to harvest September 30th – pretty close to within the window before expected frost. So 50 days before September 30 would be August 12th, and then add an additional 14 days for slower fall growth, so that would put me at a July 30th planting. If I choose to plant my leftover bean seeds, I might be too late! Or I might get lucky and we have a late frost!

If you're new to growing vegetables at the 'end' of the season, take on something easy – lettuce and radishes are both easy to grow from seed, have a very short period to maturity (around 20-30 days), and can tolerate light frosts if you don't get them planted right away. In fact, you can probably get a couple crops in yet this season.

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