

Now Is the Time to Ensure Success in the Vegetable Garden

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"Timing is everything." The person who coined this phrase was undoubtedly a gardener, because the time of year that certain cultural practices are performed often means the difference between success and failure in the garden.

Two vegetable gardening examples come to mind each time that a question about planting dates comes up. Bulbing onions and strawberries are frequently misunderstood and planted at the wrong time of year in our area.

We can produce beautiful onions with bulbs up to four inches in diameter, with flavor that rivals those Vidalia, Georgia onions that we hear so much about. To do this we must set out plants in the fall, not in the spring like they do up north. In fact, onions planted after the first of the year make puny little bulbs, or in many cases, something that looks like a giant green onion.

Many north Florida gardeners successfully grow large onions, and this is how they do it. They use varieties of "short day" onions such as Grano, Granex, Texas Grano, Excel or Tropicana Red. Granex is the variety that is used for producing Vidalia onions and St. Augustine Sweets.

Some gardeners seed their onions in September and have plants ready for transplanting to the garden in November or early December. Others just buy the plants of these varieties during the fall.

These plants are established four to five inches apart in rows that are twelve to twenty-four inches apart. A couple of light fertilizations will be required during the season to keep them vigorous. Onions grow well during our relatively mild winters and will be ready for harvest in early May.

Many gardeners also go wrong with strawberries by planting them in the spring here. In our area of the country, they should be planted during October and November. Like onions, strawberry plants are very cold hardy, producing a full sized plant by spring and yielding a crop during March, April, and May.



Use only "short day" strawberry varieties. These include Chandler, Sweet Charlie, Dover, Selva, Oso Grande, Florida Belle, and Florida 90.

The time for planting other cool season vegetables is also fast approaching. The first planting of these can be done in August: broccoli, cauliflower, collards, bunching onions, and turnips. During September most other winter vegetables can be established including: beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, endive, escarole, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, parsley and radish.

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The time of year that many flowering and shrubby perennials are transplanted also makes a big difference. Amaryllis and daylily bulbs are best divided during September. Fall is the ideal time to move a shrub from one place in the yard to another.

The subject of proper timing can be applied to fertilization, spraying for pest control, pruning and almost any other gardening practice. Done at the right time, expect good results. On the other hand, if done at the wrong time of year much time and money is wasted.

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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