

Planting a Fall Vegetable Garden

Jim Kirschke

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Late August has always been a good time to start your fall vegetable garden. However the heavy rains we have experienced during July and August have presented a problem. In many areas around Tallahassee the soil has been too wet to work. But don't be discouraged. You can still get a good start in early September. Wait for a few consecutive days without rain before you start turning soil. Before you start to dig make sure the soil is not too wet.

While it is usually best to prepare your soil several weeks before planting, you may have to shorten the prep time this year so that you can get some of your plants in early enough to bear before our first frost. Most cool weather crops do best if planted before the end of September. Tomatoes, which should have been planted by now, could still be planted if you are willing to risk an early frost.

If you are going to plant in an area you used for your spring and summer crops be particularly careful to remove all dead or diseased plant material, including their roots. Then turn the soil to expose any remaining roots to sunlight. Our hot, wet weather is a natural breeder of trouble.

Vegetables need a fertile and well cultivated soil. Cultivate as deeply and as early as possible before planting. It is usually recommended that organic soil amendments be added at this time. Be careful that anything you add has been well composted and thoroughly mixed into the soil. This will improve your harvest. A little balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 applied at the rate of one to two pounds per 100 square feet of planting area will get most crops off to a good start.

Do not add lime, as it is too late to be of any benefit for a fall crop. Furthermore, lime should not be used unless necessary anyway. Lime requirement can only be determined with a soil test. If you are concerned about this, visit the Leon County Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road to pick up a soil test mailing kit.

Make sure your garden is in full sun. Vegetables do best with at least six hours of full sunlight during the middle of the day. In late fall the hours of sunlight are shorter and the sun is much lower in the sky, casting longer shadows. Your plot may not get as much sun as it did in the summer.

Your garden site should also be close to a water supply. After our wet summer this may not seem important but remember that fall is usually our dry period.

Carefully select the vegetable varieties you intend to plant. Unless you are adventurous and are willing to tolerate some failure stick to proven varieties.

The following cool-season vegetables are suitable for planting now:

Beets: Early Wonder, Detroit Dark Red, Red Ace

Broccoli: Early Green Sprouting, Waltham 29

Cabbage: Gourmet, Marion Market, King Cole

Carrots; Emperor, Thumbelina, Nantes, Gold Pak

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Cauliflower: Snowball Strains, Snowdrift, Snow Crown



Photo to be credited to Tobin Fricke.

Collards: Georgia, Vates, Blue Max, Hicrop Hybrid

Lettuce: Bibb (White Boston),

Leaf (Prize Head, Salad Bowl),

Romaine (Parris Island Coss, Floricos),

Crisp (Minetto, Ithica, Floricrisp)

Onion, Bunching: White Portugal, Evergreen

Radishes: Cherry Belle, Comet, Early Scarlet Globe

Spinach: Virginia Savoy, Melody, Bloomsdate, Tye

Strawberry: Florida 90, Chandler, Dover, Florida Belle

Turnips: Roots (Purple-Top, White Globe),

Tops (All Top)

These selections were taken from "Vegetable Gardening in Florida" by James M. Stephens, University of Florida Extension (University Press of Florida).

Tomato varieties will depend on availability. Check with your garden center for suggestions among those available.

Let's hope the rain let's up long enough to get something done in the garden. Good luck and good eating.

Jim Kirschke is a Master Gardener Volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County and a member of their Horticulture Advisory Committee.

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