**Weekly Express-News Article**

**By Calvin R. Finch, PhD, SAWS Director, and Horticulturist**

Saturday, August 11, 2012

**“Vegetables in Containers This Fall”**

It is not too early to plan and prepare your containers for growing vegetables this fall. Tomatoes, herbs, carrots, onions, lettuce, and greens all do well in containers. They do best in full sun but most will produce some vegetables to harvest with six hours of sun per day.

Plant tomatoes in August. There are “Patio” tomatoes recommended specifically for containers but I don’t recommend them. The plants are very attractive but the fruit is low quality. Select a regular recommended variety such as Surefire, Solar Fire, 602, Tycoon, Celebrity or Dwarf Cherry Surprise (BHN 968).

I like Surefire the best because it is the variety that produces tomatoes the quickest. It has a relatively small plant and produces a lot of tennis-ball size fruit.

Tomatoes require a container that is at least five gallons in capacity. A half whiskey barrel is ideal. The larger the container, the more reservoir is available for roots, moisture, and nutrients. A larger container also reduces the inclination of the plant to topple over, as it becomes top heavy with foliage and fruit.

Fill the container with potting soil. Container grown plants in potting soil are completely dependent on the gardener for nutrients and water so be prepared to fertilize and water frequently. Add a slow release fertilizer like osmocote liberally to the soil surface at planting and supplement the osmocote with a soluble fertilizer from the watering can every two weeks.

Irrigate whenever the soil dries to one-half inch. Apply enough water that it runs out the drain hole. As the plant matures, and if it is hot this fall, you may have to water every day.

When you place the transplant in the container, also put an aluminum tomato cage in place to support the plant as it grows.

Several cool weather herbs can be planted in late August and September for winter production. Parsley, cilantro, dill, and chives are the most common. They will prosper in containers as small as one-gallon but are easiest to grow in three-gallon containers.

Herbs require less fertilization and water than tomatoes. Irrigate when the soil dries to one inch deep. The initial application of osmocote supplemented with an application of water-soluble fertilizer every month should do the job.

When the weather cools in September, carrots, onions, lettuce, beets, and radishes can be planted by seed in containers. A half whiskey barrel or other container planted in with a single type of any of the vegetables can be very attractive in addition to providing plenty of produce. Radishes produce within four weeks of planting for two weeks. Carrots, beets, and onions take longer to mature a crop but will last all winter.

Mix several textures and colors of leaf lettuce in a pot for an attractive container that provides salad fixings all winter.

“Bright Lights” Swiss chard is especially attractive. A seed mix will provide a combination of green, yellow, white, red, and orange stemmed plants, which makes a great display in the container in addition to providing nutritious greens through the winter and into late spring.

Container gardening lends itself well to pest and disease control because it is easy to examine the plants every day. The relative isolation of the containers means that diseases aren’t likely.

Most insects can be picked off by hand; children are especially good at the task. When a spray is called for, a small supply of Spinosad, neem oil, Bt, and Safer soap should be all you need.

Peppers do very well in containers in the spring but I do not include them in my fall list because they take a longer season from planting to harvest than we usually have available.

The fall season is usually long enough for tomatoes, but just barely, and peppers take more hot weather days than tomatoes to be successful.

An exception might be if large transplants are available at the nursery now. Plant them immediately and care for them like tomatoes and you should be able to harvest a crop.

Even if the harvest is limited by the onset of cold weather, pepper foliage makes a decorative addition to the patio container garden.