

Fall Vegetables

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With the hot weather we had in August it is hard to believe that September is the month when temperatures should moderate, and we plant our winter garden!

The fall tomatoes that you planted in July as small transplants or more recently as plants in one-gallon containers will be ready to respond to the moderation of nighttime temperatures. They will utilize the root system they developed to expand the leaf surface on the plant and begin blooming. Even the heat-loving okra, eggplant, and peppers will welcome moderating temperatures to set more and larger fruit.

Assist the peppers, eggplant, and tomatoes to produce fruit by applying slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) as a side-dressing at the rate of a third cup of fertilizer per plant. For some reason gardeners this year are reporting plant injury from fertilizer applied against the plant stem more than past years. Make sure the fertilizer is spread over the root system but not against the stem.

Okra does not need more fertilizer but if fire ants are a problem use a product with Spinosad labeled for use in the vegetable garden. Baits also work if applied around the outside of the garden.

Prepare the winter garden soil by adding 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. feet of bed. It is also important that the soil be moist before seeds and transplants are put in place. It would be wonderful if it would rain, but if not, apply an inch of water with a sprinkler a few days before the garden is planted.

There is a long list of winter vegetables that can be planted in September. The cole crops including broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kale, turnips, mustard, chard, Chinese cabbage, kohlrabi, and collards head the list. It works best to use transplants for the cole crops (except for turnips and mustard). I plant cabbage and kohlrabi with 1ft. between plants and the rest with 2.5 ft. between plants (3 plants in an 8 ft. row). The cole crops are easy to grow and are very productive if you control cabbage loopers with a Bt product such as Bio-Worm Control or Dipel. Expect broccoli that is planted in September to produce heads for harvest by Thanksgiving. The same plants will then produce smaller heads into the winter. The cole crops and other greens require fertilizer side-dressing every 4 weeks for maximum production.

Plant the root crops such as beets, carrots, radishes, rutabagas, and turnips by seed. The first radishes can usually be harvested in 4 weeks. Some gardeners plant a new row every month. The other root crops take longer to be ready to harvest but can be harvested over a long season. Carrots maintain a high quality in the garden and are available for harvest into the summer.

In addition to the cole crops, lettuce provide greens for winter meals. Leaf lettuce is the easiest form of lettuce to grow. The key to successful lettuce germination is to leave the seed uncovered. Prepare the soil and lay the seed right on the surface of the moist soil. Kale is recognized as among the most nutritious vegetables but some of us find it has an unpleasantly strong taste. Mix it with mild tasting chard or collards for high nutritional values and great taste. Chard is also the green that seems to maintain its quality and last longest into the spring.

Spinach and onions are important parts of the winter garden. It is best to plant spinach transplants in late October or early November. Wait until the end of December to plant onion transplants.

For more detail on growing a winter vegetable garden visit plantanswers.com.