

If you planted broccoli, chard, kale, and collard transplants in September you are probably harvesting already. The cauliflower, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts will be ready for harvest soon. Keep them at full production by side dressing with slow-release or "winterizer" lawn fertilizer every 3 weeks. It has not been a bad season for cabbage loopers but stay alert and keep the Bt products ready. If the loopers feed unhindered on the foliage it only takes a few days to reduce the foliage to skeletons of stems.

Of the seeded vegetables, only the radishes and squash have probably reached maturity but the beets, turnips, carrots, rutabagas, and English peas, are prospering in this weather. There are some reports that lettuce seed has been reluctant to germinate. The usual problem with lettuce is that gardeners cover the seed. Lettuce seed must be placed on the soil surface to achieve germination.

All the early vegetables listed can still be planted for a spring harvest and there are some other vegetables to consider. Prepare the bed for new vegetables by incorporating 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release or "winterizer" lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. feet of bed. Two examples are 19-5-9 and 18-6-12.

Spinach transplants should be planted now. Spinach is very nutritious and overall it is the favorite green for salads and recipes. Like the other greens, harvest spinach by removing up to one-third of the foliage at a time. Spinach is not as productive as the other greens so plan on having about 6 plants per individual in the family. I place the plants 18 inches apart in the row. In addition to the popular taste, spinach lasts longer into the spring without becoming bitter than the other greens.

It is also time to plant onion transplants. Area nurseries offer as many as 8 different varieties of transplants. My favorites are 1015 mild yellow onion and for a little more onion taste, the red creole. The Legend variety that is offered is pitched as an improved selection of the 1015. Onions are high nitrogen users so be prepared to side dress the row every 3 weeks with one of the high nitrogen fertilizers described.

The onions are sold in bundles of about 60 plants. If you plant them every 4 inches in an eight-foot row that means you will have enough plants for 2.5 rows. It also means that you can use every other onion for a green onion. Use the green onions up by March 15 and the spacing of the remaining onions should be just right for full development of the bulb on the mature onions. If you plant the onions now the bulbs will reach full size about May 30. Recognize that the plants are ready to harvest by the size of the bulb and that the stalks will go from upright to laying over.

Potatoes are also planted in the garden in the winter. Late January is a good target time to plant potatoes. Obtain seed potatoes from an area nursery. You may have to call around to find a source, not all nurseries offer seed potatoes. I have the best luck with red potatoes such as Pontiac. They are sold by the pound. Select medium sized potatoes (baseball size) with at least two eyes positioned so you can cut them in half to make two seeds. After cutting them, let them dry for a day before planting. Potatoes are not as dependent on fertilizer as onions are. One option that works is to prepare the soil with 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer and forego the side dressing.

Dig a trench 12 inches deep and lay a piece of the seed potato with at least one eye every 18 inches in the trench. Cover the seed potatoes in the trench initially with 3-4 inches of soil. The potato stems will

soon emerge. As they grow upwards add more soil to cover all but the crown once or twice per week until you run out of soil. It works well to fill the trench with soil, but it is even better if you can “hill up” the soil over the trench. To accomplish the “hilling” you will have to borrow soil from other parts of the garden. Compost also works well.

You can begin to harvest your potatoes when the plants begin to bloom. Finish harvest by the time the plants have browned. Potatoes left in the ground during a wet period after the plants decline are likely to rot.

Potatoes grown in Central Texas do not store well. Use them in recipes for new potatoes.