

FALL PLANTING

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Ask a Master Gardener

Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts



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Keep the Fresh Produce Coming!

With a little effort now, it is possible to bring fresh vegetables to the table until October, November, and beyond.

By: Valerie Rose and Ginny Bode, Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardeners

It can feel heartbreaking to bring in the last head of lettuce, knowing that soon you'll need to make the transition to store-bought vegetables. But wait, more and more savvy gardeners extend the growing season by planting cool-season vegetables in the warm summer months of July and August. It may seem counter-intuitive until you try it and experience the bounty of harvesting late into the fall.

Selecting the Right Varieties is Key

Planting a fall/winter garden requires seeds and plants proven to grow well in summer heat, then ripen as the daylight shortens and the temperature drops. By planting from July to August, your fall harvest can include leafy greens, cabbage, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts, along with carrots, beets, and other root vegetables.

A light frost even brings out the best flavor in collard greens and parsnips! Now is the time to plant, selecting a location with the maximum amount of sunlight as fall moves toward winter.



Left: Be prepared to water seedlings daily as they get started. **Right:** Kale and other leafy greens do well as fall-season crops. Photos © Adobe Stock.

Plan to plant from July to early August. The chart below can be used as a guide along with the information on the back of the seed packet.

Veggie	Plant time	Harvest	Note:
Bush Beans	Until late July	Before frost	
Pole Beans	Early July	Before frost	
Beets	Before Aug	Fall and winter	
Beet Greens Only	Thru Sept 1	Fall crop	
Broccoli	Direct Seed until mid-July, transplant until mid-August	Fall and winter	Will usually continue producing past Thanksgiving, sometimes until Christmas
Brussels Sprouts	Direct seed by July 1, transplant by August 1	Fall	In protected spots harvest can continue into mid-winter
Ballhead Cabbage	Direct seed by July 1, transplant by August 1	Fall	Cabbage will hold in the garden for long periods and can be harvested until early winter
Bok Choy (Chinese Mustard)	Seed by mid-August	Fall	
Chinese Cabbage	Late July	Fall	Cabbage will hold in the garden for long periods and

			can be harvested until early winter
Savoy Cabbage	Direct Seed until mid-July, transplant until mid-August	Fall	Cabbage will hold in the garden for long periods and can be harvested until early winter
Carrots	Mid-July	Fall and winter	
Cauliflower	Direct seed by July 1, transplant by August 1	Fall	
Chicory: Witloof or French endive	Mid-July	Fall	Roots can be dug in late fall, placed in a box of moist soil, covered with sand and forced in a warm room for winter greens.
Cornsalad, (lamb's lettuce or fetticus)			September for fall use or late October to winter over for early spring use.
Endive: curled or broadleaf types	Until mid-July	Fall	In October tie leaves together to blanch hearts. A light mulch of straw will protect it from early frosts and permit harvest into winter.
Garlic	Late fall	Early summer harvest	
Kale	Seeded by July, transplant until mid-August	Fall	
Kohlrabi: white and purple	Seed until mid-July	Fall	Harvest when stems are 1-1/2" to 2" in diameter, before the stems become woody.
Lettuce: Head and Romaine	July	Fall	
Lettuce: Leaf	Mid-August	Fall	
Mustard Greens	By mid-September	Fall	See Bok Choy
Onions: green or table use	Seeded until mid-July	Fall	Seedlings made in August will normally winter over for spring use. Onion sets can be planted anytime during the fall and winter if the soil is well drained and workable.

Parsley	Seeded early July	Fall or spring use	
Radishes: Early varieties	Until mid-September	Fall	Winter radishes (oriental types and Black Spanish) should be planted in July and harvested all winter
Rutabaga	Plant in early through mid-July	Fall and winter	Leave them in the garden and harvest as you need all winter
Spinach	By mid-August	Fall	Plant in September to winter over for an early spring crop.
Swiss Chard	By mid-July	Fall	Planted in late August the plants will winter over and produce an earlier crop the following year than spring planting.
Turnips	By mid-August		For greens, plant through September

Retrieved from: <https://extension.wsu.edu/snomish/fall-and-winter-vegetable-gardens-for-western-washington/>

Look for seed catalogs that focus specifically on fall/winter gardening in west coast or northern climates. They feature helpful charts with planting dates. They also include a reminder that gardeners must plant earlier if they're growing in a colder zone than the seed company's locations. It is also an option to leave this step to a commercial grower and buy plant starts from a nursery or garden store. Read the label carefully to ensure you're getting a late-season variety.



Left: Some cool weather crops do not need to be harvested until needed since the cool air and soil can “store” the mature vegetables until you harvest. **Right:** Bush and pole bean varieties can be planted in July and harvested before first frost. Photos © Adobe Stock.

If you have a greenhouse, you can learn from writer and educator Eliot Coleman. He farms year-round in coastal Maine, harvesting fresh produce from snow-covered, unheated greenhouses. In his classic guide, 'The Winter Harvest Handbook,' Coleman coaches novice and experienced gardeners in extending the growing season. Another resource, *Winter Gardening in Maritime Northwest: Cool Season Crops for the Year-Round Gardener*, by Binda Colebrook, is especially suited for our region.

Preparing a Space: Look for the Sunny Side

Make a sun and shade map of your yard or patio. Yes, your container garden can also grow cool-season vegetables if it gets enough sun. Your fall/winter garden needs to be in a spot where the low-lying sun will still find its way into your yard, as it arcs low across the southern sky. Remember, your garden will gain more sun as the deciduous trees conveniently drop their leaves, blocking much less light. Note which buildings and fences on the southern edge of your yard will cast longer shadows as the days get shorter, causing deep shade for months.

Raised beds will keep your garden from drowning in rains that accompany the season change. A bed made of boards or cement blocks also provides an easy place to secure hoops for supporting row covers. Read more about the multiple options to extend the growing season in this Ask a Master Gardener blog article on season extenders: <https://www.skagitmg.org/season-extenders/>

Getting Started: When to Start Indoors, When to Seed Outdoors

You can either sow seeds directly into the garden or start the seeds indoors to grow sturdy young plants that can later be transplanted. The back of the seed packet may tell you this, or check out the [WSU Extension home vegetable planting guide](#). The seeds for root crops, such as carrots and beets, are best sown directly in the soil to avoid damaging the roots when transplanting.

Some gardeners prefer to start seeds indoors where they can monitor the soil and protect the seedlings from pests. If you do start seeds indoors, aim to do so 3-8 weeks before planting them in the garden. The exact timing will vary for each vegetable, depending on how long it takes to grow from seed to a transplant-sized seedling. For example, broccoli and cabbage typically take about 5-6 weeks from seed to transplanting. So, it would be best to start broccoli seeds around the beginning of August to have seedlings ready for transplanting by mid-September.

To provide warmth and light for indoor seeds, you can use a sunny window, an electric light with a germination heating mat, or a plastic or glass-covered hot box. It's essential to plant into a seedling mix, not simply potting soil. After germination, increase lighting to prevent tall, spindly plants. See the Skagit Master Gardener blog article about starting seeds indoors here:

<https://www.skagitmg.org/indoor-grow-stand/>



When moving young plants from indoors to the garden, it's crucial to gradually harden them off by exposing them to the outdoor environment. Not doing so could cause sunburn and stress for the plants. To harden off the plants, place them in a location outdoors that receives 2-3 hours of sunlight for the first couple of days and bring them inside at night. Gradually increase the time in the sunlight and wind conditions for a week before transplanting into the garden.

Whether direct planting or transplanting seedlings, prepare the garden soil by adding compost and organic matter to improve its texture and fertility. Be prepared to water daily, during the driest time of the year. You can water by hand, or set up a drip irrigation system to consistently water through the hot days of summer. See the Skagit Master Gardener blog article on drip system: <https://www.skagitmg.org/diy-drip-irrigation/>

Be sure to mulch between seedlings and rows. Straw or other mulch will retain soil moisture at the plant roots, which is crucial during the warm days at the end of August and in early September. Mulch will also suppress weed growth. Keep in mind that plants grow slowly in the diminished sunlight starting late October. Therefore, some gardeners can grow their plants to harvest stage beginning in late November. Then the cool air and soil can "store" the mature cool weather crops until you harvest.

The successful gardener will be rewarded by protecting young plants from pests and providing them with some shade if the weather gets too hot. It is important to regularly monitor the growth of the plants, provide adequate support if needed, and address any signs of disease or nutrient deficiencies.



Young carrots mulched with straw. Photo © Valerie Rose

Take time at the height of summer to plant a fall/winter garden. The fresh, delicious harvest will brighten your autumn and winter meals.

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