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Starting a Fall Vegetable Garden

July marks the beginning of the second half of the vegetable gardening season. Fall vegetables may be grown from seed or transplanted in July and August, then harvested during the months of September, October, November, or later if climate is still mild. Many hardy vegetables not only survive the long fall, but also attain excellent quality because of cool temperatures and bright sunny days. All cool weather crops, especially those in the brassica family (including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, turnip, and others) may grow their best in the fall. It is during this period that the plants develop a sweet or nutty flavor that is not present in main season crops.

Planting Time

In July, many vegetables may be directly seeded or grown from transplants in plenty of time for a normal fall harvest. At this time the soil is very warm and seeds germinate rapidly; at the same time there may be much less competition from weeds than during an April or May planting.

Seeds that are planted must come into direct contact with moist soil in order to germinate, and this soil moisture must be maintained in order for the young plants to survive. Small seeds such as lettuce and spinach may be frozen in ice cubes then planted. This helps them break dormancy. The major drawback of summer planting is hot, dry weather that makes careful attention to watering necessary. You may use shade cloth to protect seedlings from hot summer sun until they are large enough to stand the heat or the weather cools.

What to Grow?

See the planting guide at the end of this sheet for a list of vegetables that may be successfully seeded or transplanted for fall harvest. In many cases, a gardener will want to seed successively so that the harvest is extended over a long period of time. The dates given in the table are general dates for either seeding or transplanting as indicated, but this will vary depending on variety and environmental conditions. Eventually, your own experience should be your guide. Since different vegetable varieties may mature at widely different rates, choose those that have the fewest days to maturity. Add two weeks to these days to maturity to compensate for the cooler days and less intense sunshine of autumn. In Rockland County, more tender vegetables such as lettuce, squash and beans will be damaged by hard freezes in late October or early November. You can protect tender vegetables from a light frost with a row cover or blanket. Hardy vegetables, such as leek, Brussels sprouts, kale and many root crops may be heavily mulched and harvested throughout the winter.

Insects and Disease

A possible drawback to a fall vegetable garden is an increased chance of problems with insects and diseases. The damp, rainy periods of September and October could lead to increased infection by mildew, other fungi and bacterial diseases. Insects that cause injury, such as aphids, cabbage moth caterpillars, leaf hoppers and others may also reach peak populations in late July or August. Slugs are also plentiful in late summer. Therefore, some extra attention to pest management may be necessary. Inspect your plants regularly; if you catch an infestation in an early stage, it is much easier to treat. Cooperative Extension can help you sort out the good from the bad. (There is a nominal fee for insect identifications.)

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Determine whether the damage is worth treating. Will the plant outgrow the injury? Can you cut out the affected portion? Is frost right around the corner? It may not make sense to treat the problem if the damage is negligible or if the season is almost over.

If the injury does require treatment, there are many cultural or non-chemical methods you may use, such as traps, barriers and handpicking. Pesticides should be used as a method of last resort. If necessary, choose least toxic products such as insecticidal soap, horticultural oil, neem, potassium bicarbonate or *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt.): follow label directions.

Keep plants healthy. Make sure your plants have adequate sunlight and moisture. Vegetables require six to eight hours of direct sun and at least one inch of water per week to grow normally. Space plants so that air circulates freely. Keep weed competition to a minimum. Mulching the soil keeps down weeds and conserves moisture. Fertilize as necessary, but not too much, since excess nitrogen creates weak growth that attracts sucking insects such as aphids, scale and also mites. Incorporate plenty of organic matter (compost) into your soil.

Vegetable Planting Guide

Our average first fall frost is November 5, although the actual date may vary widely from year to year as fall frosts are often more variable than those in spring. To determine when to start your fall garden outdoors, add two weeks to your vegetable maturity date, then count back to find the appropriate planting time. Some faster maturing crops may be planted through mid-September. Vegetables are followed by days to maturity from seed or transplant in ().

All times are approximate.

Summer/Fall Direct Seed Outdoors (July to August) Faster maturing vegetables may be planted up to mid-September	Summer/Fall Transplant Outdoors (July to August)
Bean, bush (50-60)	Cabbage (65-80)
Beet (55-65)	Cauliflower (55-60)
Broccoli (60-80)	Kale (55-75)
Cabbage (65-80)	Lettuce, head (60-85)
Carrot (70-80)	Fall Transplant Outdoors (Late September to Mid-October)
Chard, Swiss (60-75)	
Chinese Broccoli or Kale (55-70)	
Chinese Cabbage/Bok Choy (40-50)	
Endive (65-85)	
Escarole (45-50)	
Kohlrabi (50-70)	
Lettuce, leaf (50-60)	Garlic, cloves (90-150)
Lettuce, head (60-85)	Shallot, sets (90-150)
Mustard Greens (40-50)	
Peas (60-80)	
Peas, edible podded (58-72)	
Radish (25-30)	
Radish, winter/Asian (30-60)	
Rutabaga (28-100)	
Spinach (50-70)	
Turnip (40-60)	

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The information on pest management for New York State contained in this publication is dated July 2011. The user is responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date pest management information. Contact any Cornell Cooperative Extension county office or PMEP (<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/>), the Cornell Cooperative Extension pesticide information website. The information herein is no substitute for pesticide labeling. The user is solely responsible for reading and following manufacturer's labeling and instructions.