

# Fall vegetable gardens offer opportunity

Fall vegetable gardening can be just as rewarding as spring and summer gardening! Any cool-season vegetable suitable for spring can also be grown in the fall. Some warm-season vegetables can still be planted in early to mid-August if varieties with short maturity dates are selected.

Spring gardens germinate in cool and moist conditions and mature as temperatures grow warmer and the days get longer. Fall gardens germinate when in drier, warmer conditions and longer days and then mature as temperatures get colder, soil gets moist, and days get shorter. Don't let these challenges discourage your fall gardening plans, as these problems can be overcome.

Fortunately, this year we have had good rainfall for several weeks providing good soil moisture for the establishment of fall



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crops. While soil moisture is good at this time, fall gardens are challenged by occasionally dry fall periods as October is considered the driest month of the year.

Soil moisture will be critical to getting good germination. Higher temperatures and possibly sparse rainfall contribute to drier soil conditions. You may want to plant the seed slightly deeper to prevent the seed from drying out before germination. Mulching soil surface with straw or other material will help prevent soil from drying out.

You may want to consider "Season Extension" for your garden. This is a newer term in vegetable production that simply means to extend the period of time of adequate growing conditions for vegetables. Season extension can allow cool-season vegetables to grow into early winter and resume in late winter. There will typically only be six to nine weeks in the winter that cool-season vegetables cannot be grown. This method will also work for extending season of warm-season vegetables.

To successfully grow vegetables out of season, you will need to moderate the microclimate around the vegetables. You can accomplish this by using row covers, plastic, blankets, carpet, straw or any other material that can insulate. These materials can be combined for increased protection from sub-freezing temper-

atures. Heat sources such as a light bulb can provide short-term protection from those surprise cold nights.

When using plastic, you must be careful to prevent overheating by allowing for ventilation when necessary. Gardeners often use a "hoop-style" support for plastic. Depending on the vegetable and the low temperature, vegetables will become dormant, but will resume growth very early the next year. During the mild winter of 2012, some vegetables continued to grow throughout the winter with protection. The possibilities are only limited by the innovation of the gardener.

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