

Ag column  
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Monday, July 31, 2017

## Plant a Fall Garden

Fall vegetable gardening can offer fresh cool-season vegetables through the fall season with some season extension measures.

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.

Spring soil moisture was more than adequate, but conditions have turned much drier in most areas. Fall gardeners will need to watch soil moisture as fall vegetable gardens are established. Fall gardens can also face dry weather as October is known as 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. 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 6 to 9 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 temperatures. 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.