

## Fall Vegetable Gardening

By Earl Hockin, Master Gardener

Fall vegetable gardening is an opportunity that some may miss or may not understand. It can be considered a form of succession planting to enable a fall harvest. Doing so means you can enjoy fresh vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, spinach, Irish potatoes, and summer squash in the fall though they are often considered spring vegetables.

Kale is a great fall vegetable. Direct sow seeds in the garden throughout August. Watering at least an inch per week and mulching around the plant will keep the soil damp to help the kale during the warmer part of late summer and early fall. Kale is actually frost hardy and the flavor improves after a bit of frost. Radishes can be direct seeded through the middle of September. When you harvest radishes, you can store them in a cool location for up to 2 months. However, if you put them in the fridge, they will lose moisture and shrivel up. Spinach can also be direct seeded until mid-September. Spinach grows best when the soil temperature is below 68 degrees. Spinach varieties such as Giant Winter will usually survive over winter if protected by row cover. They will not grow between mid-November to mid-January. However, if planted by mid-September, they grow enough to be suitable for harvesting even over winter.

Turnips that are planted in August will be ready to enjoy by early October. You will find the turnip greens will be crispy and tasty once the nighttime temperatures become cool in October. Similarly, carrot greens are tasty. You can find a variety of recipes for both of these on the internet.

If you like snap peas and/or English peas start the seeds indoors between moist paper towels by mid-August. Once they have germinated showing the embryonic root and stem, carefully plant them in your garden about an inch deep with the embryonic roots facing down. Plant them in the shade of other garden plants or deciduous trees to protect them from intensive heat waves. Also be sure to keep the soil well-watered.

Vegetables to direct sow in August include beets, carrots, Swiss chard, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce, mustard, okra, radish, rutabaga, southern pea, summer squash and turnips. Vegetables to grow as transplants in August are broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, and head lettuce. As leaf lettuce does not germinate at warm temperatures, start the seeds indoors. When they have formed four true leaves, transplant them outside in a shaded area. Before planting, remove any finished plants and add a fertilizer such as 10-10-10. Read the instructions on the seed packet to determine how much you should add.

Please note that as the weather cools in the fall you can protect your vegetables from up to 4 degrees of frost by using row cover tunnels. This allows you to effectively move the date of the first fall frost by a minimum of two weeks later. So, in effect you can treat Oct 24<sup>th</sup> as the first fall frost date. Row cover cloth is a spun polyester material. It will allow 75-85% percent of the light through and will allow rain through. In addition, it keeps insects away from your vegetables. It is best to use either PVC or metal hoops over which you stretch the row cover and weigh it down on the soil, as this allows the crop to grow properly. There are many YouTube videos that show how to use row covers. To use the row cover over hoops you need to purchase row cover material that is a minimum of 8' wide so it will fit over hoops that should be a minimum of 6'8" long.

Keep those fresh vegetables coming for months after summer with good planning and materials to keep frost away!

One great resource for determining planting dates is available at <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W346-b.pdf>

Another useful resource for our area is <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/central-north-carolina-planting-calendar-for-annual-vegetables-fruits-and-herbs>

**How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

*The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.*