

Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening and Harvesting (published 2026-10-03)
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Eating vegetables that you have grown has several advantages. If you do organic gardening, then you can be confident that the vegetables you harvest will not contain chemicals that may be undesirable or, for some, cause problems. If you can successfully grow your own vegetables, you will be saving money and be able to have ones that are not commonly sold in grocery stores.

There are many cool season vegetables that have varieties that are surprisingly cold tolerant. Kale survives temperatures down to or even lower than 0° F. Parsnips survive sub-zero temperatures and can be left in the ground to harvest all winter long. In fact, many of the vegetables that are mentioned in this article can be harvested all winter long as well as during early spring. Carrots, being underground, do well below freezing, particularly if they are heavily mulched with things like leaves, straw or wood chips. Spinach will survive down to 15°F or even colder if under row cover, or if it is well mulched. Brussel sprouts thrive in sub-freezing temperatures and taste better after being exposed to cold weather.

Row cover is a polyester material. A light-weight row cover is particularly useful as it lets at least 80% of the light and rain to reach the plants and completely prevents freezing down to 28° F. If the soil is warm, the row cover will protect to even as low as 24°F. For vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, Swiss chard, collards, and leeks, temperatures down to 20° F are tolerated even if not covered. When covered with row cover, they can survive up to 4 degrees colder. The row cover should be at least 7ft wide, so that it can be laid over an arch of metal or vinyl tubing that is about 6'8" long for a 4' wide raised bed. This will provide a sufficient height for vegetables like spinach, cabbage, etc.

Another advantage to row cover is that it adds protection to the vegetables from insect pests, birds and small animals like squirrels. For example, bush beans with row cover prevents Japanese beetles from feeding on the leaves. However, when the beans begin flowering the cover has to be removed to allow pollinating insects to reach the flowers.

Spinach, baby kale, arugula, Swiss chard, cilantro, seeds of winter mix lettuce, including Rouge d'Hiver, Tangoi, black-seeded Simpson, and red leaf can also be sown through September.

Here is a photo of one of my crops of spinach seeds sown in September 2015 under row cover and harvested February 6th 2016 after a big snow storm 2 weeks earlier.



Resources

“Plants for Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardens,” <https://utianews.tennessee.edu/plants-for-fall-and-winter-vegetable-gardens/>

“Fall Vegetable Gardening,” <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/fall-vegetable-gardening/>

“Fall Vegetable Gardening,” <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-334/426-334.html>

“Planning for Year Round Harvest,” <https://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/news/planning-for-year-round-harvest/>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IkIH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County’s YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

How do I ask a question?

If you have questions for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at 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.