



## Fall gardening can keep fresh vegetables on the table

Gardeners may have noticed a bit of a slowdown in their vegetable production now that we're nearing the end of summer. Some gardeners may be ready to hang up the trowel for the season. However, those who want to keep the fresh taste of summer around for a few more months still have time to get some cool-season plants in the ground.

You'll need to choose vegetables that grow quickly, such as lettuce, spinach, mustard, radish, beet, collard, Swiss chard, turnip, kohlrabi and kale to ensure a harvest before the first hard frost. These cool-season crops like to get their start in warm soil and come to maturity when the days and nights are cool.

Go ahead and plant onions, garlic and leek now, but these plants won't be ready to harvest until sometime between late spring and to early June of next year. For those who are able to get broccoli and cauliflower seedlings, get those in the ground, too. Some areas in southern Oklahoma may even be able to get away with growing a few more tomatoes and peppers.

The key to survival for these cool-season plants is to keep the plants cool and moist until temperatures begin to drop. You can purchase shade cloth specifically for this purpose, or use other materials found around the house. Old window screens, scrap wood staked vertically and extra pieces of landscape fabric work well in reducing temperatures and dry winds that can exhaust young plants. Grass clippings sprinkled lightly on top of young seedlings about 1/8-inch thick will cool the soil, reduce evaporation and suppress weed seeds on the soil surface.

Tender crops, those that develop from flowers and produce fruits, include tomatoes, cucumbers, okra, squashes, melons, pumpkins, peppers, eggplants and beans. The key to planting these tender crops in late summer for a second harvest is to allow enough time for them to reach maturity, which is about 50 days.

With a little effort in late summer, gardeners will have a splendid harvest of greens and root vegetables in the fall. The growing season can be extended even further for those who use floating row covers or garden tunnels. With any luck, you'll still be eating from your garden at Thanksgiving or even Christmas.

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