Fall garden planning starts in the heat of the summer

Much of Oklahoma has received ample rainfall this summer and the temperature hasn’t been too hot compared to other summers. Even though it may not have felt like the typical Oklahoma summer, it’s time to start planning for your fall garden.

Late July and into August is the best time to start getting plants in the ground to be able to harvest by the fall season. Some tender vegetables that can be started now and harvested before fall frosts include beans, cilantro, sweet corn, cucumber, pumpkin, and summer and winter squash. It’s a good idea to choose varieties that mature early and are disease resistant. Beet, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, garlic, leaf lettuce, parsnip and radish are examples of semi-hardy plants that continue to grow well and be harvested after several frosts.

Just as many gardeners do in the early spring growing season, some of the fall plants may grow more easily when started from seed and then transplant the seedlings. It’s much easier to grow seedling plants under partial shade and with insect protection than it is to seed directly into the garden plot.

Gardeners need to keep actual production time in mind when planting. Some crops may produce a crop in as quickly as 20 days to 30 days. This allows gardeners to make successive planting for a continuous supply.

When talking about the fall season and fall gardening, keep in mind there still will be a fair amount of hot weather. Make sure the garden soil continually absorbs water readily and doesn’t form a crust when drying. Gardeners also want it to drain sufficiently so it doesn’t become waterlogged. A porous soil contains more air, which is necessary for vigorous root growth. Remember, the soil also must contain nutrients. Additional fertilizers may be beneficial to stimulate growth and production.

Although the fall season is just around the corner, August still will involve high soil temperature, high light intensity and rapid drying of the soil, resulting in an increase in the problems of obtaining a uniform stand of plants. Achieving a full stand of plants in the heat at the end of summer may require special treatments. This might include shade over rows when seeded, along with supplemental watering to reduce soil temperature and aid in seed germination.

To germinate, viable seed must have the proper temperature, adequate moisture and sufficient oxygen. Vegetable seeds shouldn’t be planted any deeper than three times the diameter of the seed. To achieve proper temperature and adequate moisture, apply mulch over the row following planting and watering.
Gardeners don’t get a break from insects and weeds at this time of year. Be sure to check frequently for insect activity and weed growth and use appropriate control measures.

Cold frames and row covers can make year-round gardening possible in Oklahoma. Salad crops are quite successful if grown in cold frames and harvested on an as-needed basis well into the winter months.

Oklahoma State University Extension offers additional fall gardening tips online.

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