

Know this if you want to start a fall garden

In these days of uncertainty, where the cost of living is higher than ever, for a frugal person, it makes sense to grow their own garden to cut down on their grocery bill. When that's the case, you must do everything in your power to make sure you increase the yield of your garden.

Every season has various benefits and limitations, and timing your sowing properly will increase your chance of success and improve the yield, no matter how small or big your garden is. Of course, knowing the limitations of your planting zones, the time needed for a plant to reach maturity, the care required for each plant, and the frost dates are all pieces of this puzzle called gardening. However, if you're not new to gardening, you should already have this covered. In today's article, I'll discuss how to start a fall garden.

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What is a Fall Garden?

A fall garden is a type of garden that is purposefully designed and planted to produce vegetables and herbs during the fall season. This gardening practice, as the name implies, is used during autumn when there are cooler temperatures and shorter days. It is a traditional gardening method that allows

gardeners to extend the growing season, helping them enjoy fresh produce during the colder months.

Key Characteristics

Timing is everything, so fall gardens are typically planted in late summer to early fall, depending on the region's climate. The goal is to time planting so your crops can mature before the first hard frost.

Crop selection also plays an important role since you need cool-season crops for your fall garden. Vegetables like kale, spinach, beets, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts, just to name a few, are the most suited candidates for the fall garden. Herbs, such as cilantro and parsley, also thrive in cooler temperatures.

These types of gardens are popular in regions with mild winters, but they can be adapted to various climates. In colder regions, season extension techniques such as cold frames and greenhouses are often used to protect the plants from frost.

Benefits

A fall garden will significantly extend the harvesting season and provide fresh produce when the summer crops are exhausted.

In cooler temperatures, your plants are better protected since the presence of many common garden pests and diseases is highly reduced. This will result in healthier plants and better yields.

Many fall vegetables taste better (with a sweeter flavor) when they are exposed to light frost. One such example is Brussels sprouts.

What's the Proper Planting Time for a Fall Garden?

For a fall garden, the proper planting time varies depending on your local climate and the vegetables you plan to grow (because vegetables are the most cultivated plants). The key to success is to make sure that your plants have enough time to mature before the first serious frost of the season.

As mentioned previously, understanding frost dates plays a crucial role in growing a fall garden. You will need to consult various online resources to identify the typical date of the first frost in your area. This will serve as a reference point for planning your planting schedule.

You will also need to calculate the number of frost-free days left in the growing season. By doing so, you will be able to determine the latest possible planting dates for your various crops.

Planting Schedule:

Leafy Greens, which are fast-growing crops, should be planted relatively close to the first frost date. For example, lettuce can often be planted 6-8 weeks before the first frost.

For common **root vegetables** such as carrots, beets, and radishes, these need more time to mature and should be planted about 8-10 weeks before the first frost.

Brassicas like broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts require more time to grow, so you need to plan your planting timeframe to cover their longer growing period. It's recommended to start them 10-12 weeks before the first frost.

Regional Considerations

In **Northern Climates** with cooler regions and shorter growing seasons, it's recommended to start planting your fall crops in

mid to late summer (July to early August). It's also advised to use season extension techniques, with row covers and cold frames being the most popular methods to protect your plants.

In **Southern Climates** with warmer regions and mild winters, it's recommended to start planting later in the season (August to September) since the risk of frost is lower. In some regions, fall crops can be planted continually into the winter months.

What Can You Plant in a Fall Garden?

Contrary to popular belief, a fall garden can accommodate a variety of vegetables, herbs, and even some flowers, if you desire. These plants are typically cool-season crops that can withstand light frosts and sometimes even benefit from them. Here's what you can plant in your fall garden:

Vegetables

- **Lettuce:** Varieties like romaine, butterhead, and leaf lettuce are recommended for the fall garden.
- **Spinach:** Go with the following varieties: Bloomsdale Long Standing, Winter Bloomsdale, and Giant Winter. Hardy green can be harvested young for tender leaves or allowed to mature.
- **Kale:** Kale varieties, such as curly, lacinato, and red Russian, thrive in cool weather and can become sweeter after a frost.
- **Swiss Chard:** A colorful and nutritious green that can

tolerate light frosts.

Root Vegetables:

- Carrots: For carrots, Nantes, Danvers, Chantenay, Emperor, and Paris Market are the recommended varieties.
- Beets: Go with the following varieties for your fall garden: Detroit Dark Red, Bull's Blood, and Cylindra.
- Radishes: I recommend the following varieties: French Breakfast, Cherry Belle, Easter Egg, and Daikon (Japanese).
- Turnips: For your fall garden, try the following: Hakurei (Japanese), Golden Ball, and White Egg.

Brassicas:

- Broccoli: Kids don't like broccoli, but that's on them. If you do like it, try these varieties: Di Cicco, Calabrese, Green Magic, and Arcadia.
- Cauliflower: For cauliflower, you can't go wrong with Graffiti (Purple), Cheddar (Orange), and Veronica (Romanesco).
- Brussels Sprouts: Try these varieties: Long Island Improved, Diablo, Oliver, and Red Rubine.

- Cabbage: For cabbage, these varieties are perfect for your fall garden: Golden Acre, Early Jersey Wakefield, Red Acre, Savoy Perfection, and Ruby Ball.

Other Recommendations:

- Peas: Varieties like sugar snap and snow peas are recommended for a late fall harvest.
- Leeks: These have a long growing season but are hardy and can be harvested well into winter. Go with varieties such as King Richard, American Flag, Carentan, Musselburgh, and Lancelot.

Herbs

- Cilantro: Prefers cooler temperatures and can be harvested throughout the fall. You can try your luck with the Santo, Calypso, and Slow Bolt varieties since these are the most common ones.
- Parsley: A biennial herb that thrives in cooler weather and can survive light frosts. Try Italian Flat Leaf (Giant of Italy), Curly Leaf (Dark Green Curled), Moss Curled, and Parisienne varieties.
- Dill: This aromatic herb grows well in the fall and can be used fresh or dried. Recommended varieties are Bouquet, Fernleaf, Dukat, and Superdukat.

What Work Is Needed in Your Fall Garden?

Maintaining a fall garden requires a series of tasks (just as with any garden) to ensure that plants thrive in the cooler weather. Here is what you need to do to have a successful fall garden:

Soil Preparation

Clear the ground and remove any leftover summer crops and weeds. Adding compost or well-rotted manure is highly recommended to enrich the soil. Lightly till the soil to improve aeration and create a good seedbed for planting.

Planting

For quick-growing crops like radishes, spinach, and lettuce, you should sow seeds directly into the soil. Start seeds indoors for longer-maturing crops like broccoli and cauliflower, then transplant the seedlings into the garden. Check the recommended spacing and planting depth for each crop, and make sure you follow those guidelines to ensure the plants have enough room to grow.

Mulching

To help retain soil moisture, you will need to apply a layer of mulch around the base of the plants. This is especially important in regions with dry winters. Mulching, besides keeping soil moisture, also helps suppress weeds, so there will be less competition for your fall crops.

Watering

Ensure consistent watering, especially during dry spells. In some regions, fall rains may reduce the need for frequent watering, but you should check soil moisture regularly. To reduce the risk of fungal diseases, we use soaker hoses or

drip irrigation to water just the base of plants.

Pest and Disease Management

Check plants regularly for signs of pests and diseases. Since I do not make a habit of using chemicals in my garden, I had good results using insecticidal soaps or neem oil. I highly recommend you try these organic pest control methods.

Frost Protection

As mentioned previously, cold frames are the ideal solution for protecting your plants during frosty conditions.

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Harvesting

Harvest crops regularly as they mature to encourage continued production and to enjoy the freshest produce. Clean and store harvested vegetables properly to extend their shelf life. A root cellar is ideal for preserving your fall crops.

General Maintenance

Prune plants to remove dead or diseased foliage and thin seedlings to reduce overcrowding and improve air circulation. You will also need to provide support for fast-growing plants that need it. In general, the use of stakes or cages is recommended for any tall plant to prevent it from toppling over in windy conditions.

Conclusion

Maintaining a fall garden involves a combination of planting, frost protection, and general upkeep. If you manage to perform these tasks diligently, you can ensure a productive and healthy garden. Sure, Mother Nature can throw you a curveball every once in a while, but you have all the tools to achieve bountiful harvests throughout the fall season.