Fall Vegetable Gardens

Planting a fall vegetable garden is a great way to extend the gardening season so you can continue to harvest produce after summer crops have long finished producing. Many cool season vegetables such as carrots, spinach, lettuce, and radishes produce their best flavor during cool weather, making them perfect candidates for a fall garden. August and September is the most common time to plant a fall garden.

**Site Preparation**

To prepare the site for fall planting you must first remove the remains of the summer garden. Compost any disease and insect free foliage and thoroughly weed the area before planting your fall crops. If you are preparing a new space for your garden, pick a location that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight each day. Prepare the soil by adding one to two inches of compost or the required nutrients and lime recommended by your soil test and till to a depth of at least 6 to 8 inches.

**Planting**

Once the site has been prepared, you can start planting. Remember when planting your garden that your plants will grow larger in size throughout the growing season so space vegetables according to label or seed-packet instructions. Direct seeding of crops is often used in the fall instead of transplants. Water dry soil about an hour before sowing and allow to drain. Plant your seeds at the depth and distance indicated on the seed packet. Success with direct seeding is dependant on adequate germination of seeds which depends heavily on a good irrigation system. If you are unable to provide adequate and frequent moisture to your germinating seeds, planting vegetables purchased from a local garden center would be a good choice. Do not allow seedlings and young transplants to dry out excessively. For directly sown seeds, stands will likely need to be thinned once seedlings are 1-2” tall. If you find that your plants are too close together, thin out unwanted plants by snipping them at the base of their stems with scissors. This method of thinning will avoid disturbing the roots of the plants you wish to save. If you are using transplants the best time to plant is during damp overcast weather.
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Aftercare

Once your planting is done, be sure to water adequately, provide organic or inorganic fertilizer, watch for pests and diseases, dig or pull up any weeds as they appear, and harvest constantly to stimulate further production. If rainfall is inadequate, apply 1 inch of water each week to thoroughly moisten the soil. When you water it is important to soak the plants thoroughly, allowing the water to penetrate deeply. Drip irrigation is the recommended way to water since it conserves water, is more efficient, and reduces the incidence of foliar diseases when compared to overhead irrigation. Placing a soaker hose around each plant is a cost effective way to install drip irrigation to your garden bed. Mulching around crops with straw or leaf litter is another effective way to limit water loss. At the end of the growing season this same mulch can be incorporated into the soil to help add organic matter. Building soil organic matter is particularly important for sandy soils, which are prevalent in Wayne County. Be sure to harvest your crops regularly to help extend the length of the harvest period.

Season Protection

October 30th is the first average frost date for our county, so be prepared to protect tender fall vegetables past this date. Tender vegetables can be protected using either milk jugs or large plastic bottles for individual plants or row covers can be used to shelter multiple plants at a time. Most semi-hardy to hardy vegetables such as collards and kale require little or no frost protection. In fact some crops, such as collards, develop a better taste after they have been subjected to a frost. In addition some root crops, like carrots, can be left in the ground throughout the winter, harvesting them as they are needed.

Plant your fall vegetable garden now, and get ready to enjoy fresh produce all autumn long.

We are pleased to be able to provide you this educational information.

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