

Play it cool in your fall garden and you'll be good to grow

(ARA) - If you think the end of summer means your vegetable gardening days are done, you'll need to reconsider. The weeks when summer fades into fall are actually an opportune time to plant cool-weather crops. Fall is a great time of year for planting vegetables.

Some of nature's most nutritious greens and veggies thrive in cooler temperatures. Planting them now, at summer's end, can ensure a bountiful fall harvest. Plus you'll save a bundle by avoiding the produce aisle in your grocery store for a few more months.

The sunny, cooler weather of autumn is perfect for many vegetables. With increased rainfall and temperatures ranging between 60 and 80 degrees in the day and higher than 40 at night, your plants suffer less, increasing your likelihood of good harvest. You can even cope with frost; some hardy vegetables can thrive without frost protection, and covering less resistant plants when frost threatens can keep them thriving.

The secrets of successful fall planting don't differ much from the techniques you've used during high season. Cool crops will need at least six hours of sun daily, ample water and a steady supply of much-needed nutrients. You can get a jump-start by planting transplants. Seed germination of cool crops during late summer requires much attention to detail. Transplants are a quicker, easier route to ensure success.

Bonnie Plants, the largest producer of vegetables and herbs in North America, offers some quick tips for picking the right plants for your fall garden:

* Choose fast-growing, leafy cool crops like broccoli, Swiss chard, lettuce, kale, spinach, collards and arugula. Leafy vegetables are actually harder to grow in the summer, when the heat can cause them to "bolt," forming flowers and seeds. Bolting leaves edible portions tasting bitter. You could choose to plant two rounds of these vegetables, in spring and again in late summer.

* Don't delay. The ideal time to plant your fall crops is before the end of August, although if you missed that window, it doesn't mean you can't still have a successful fall harvest. It just might take more time and ingenuity.

* Pick a place. Your existing garden is the perfect place to plant cool weather crops. Remember, frost flows downhill like water, so spots at the top of a slope or in south-facing locations will remain warmest.

* You can also plant your fall crops in raised beds, which are easy to cover when frost threatens, or in pots that can be brought inside when temperatures dip too low.

* Know how they grow. Pay close attention to "days to maturity" information listed on plant tags. You'll want to give plants enough time to produce before killing frost arrives.

* Good gardening practices will get your fall garden growing. Loosen soil before you plant and mix in some all-natural fertilizer, like Bonnie Plants Herb and Vegetable Plant Food. Made from soybean oilseed extract, this food contains 150,000 nutritional and vital organic compounds including vitamins, minerals, amino acids, proteins, enzymes, plant hormones and carbohydrates, it's an excellent source of nutrition in home gardens.

Consider these popular plants from Bonnie,

Packman Broccoli - This hardy vegetable develops best during the cool season. It matures in 45 to 55 days and has large, bright green, mildly flavored domed heads. Plant transplants 18 inches apart in rows 30 inches apart.

Top Bunch Collards - This hybrid is heavy yielding, early maturing, and more uniform than traditional varieties. The leaves are upright, broad, and a beautiful, waxy, deep green. These collards grow best in full sun, but will tolerate partial shade. Like all collards, they are rich in vitamins and sweetened by frost. Space transplants 36 inches apart in rows 36 inches apart.

Spinach - A cool-weather vegetable related to beets and Swiss chard, Bonnie's Spinach is a fast-growing plant. It yields many leaves in a short time in fall. Although it prefers full sun, spinach is one of the few vegetables that produce a respectable harvest in partial shade.

With some advanced planning, active attention, and the right choice of plants, you can continue to enjoy your garden and fresh, flavorful produce, long after the dog days of summer are done. To learn more about cool season varieties and helpful hints on getting your garden growing, visit **www.bonnieplants.com**.