

## THIS SEASON

# Cool weather crops are hot this fall

The growing season isn't over with the arrival of cool weather. Until the first hard frost hits, you have plenty of time to plant, pick and plate cool-weather crops. You'll save yourself some money in the grocery's produce aisle, too.

Fall is a great time for gardening, thanks to milder temperatures, a decrease in garden pests and moister, well-draining soil. These conditions are ideal for crops that prefer cooler weather. Some vegetables even taste better when nipped by frost.

August is the optimum time for planting cool crops, to ensure they will have time to mature before the first freeze. Choose varieties that mature quickly; you can find the days to maturity on plant tags. Starting with transplants, rather than seed, will make the process easier.

If you've been diligent in your garden all summer, you won't have much more work to do. Even if your garden got a little ahead of your efforts, it won't take long to get it into shape for a second season of planting. Just follow these simple steps:

### Tidy Up

Remove spent plants, like early planted beans, cucumbers or lettuce, since they're pretty much done for the season and can harbor pests. Clear away holes left from pulling plants and get rid of weeds before they go to seed. Throw away anything distressed and compost the rest.

Discard any fallen fruits, because rotting produce can attract pests. Take note of where everything was planted, so you can be sure to rotate your crops next spring.

### Revive the Soil

Freshen garden soil by removing and replacing the existing layer of mulch. Straw makes an excellent cover because it's

easily scattered; it's also a favorite home for spiders, which will help control insect pests. Another good mulch is a layer of shredded leaves.

Loosen compacted soil and fluff it up with a garden fork. Major tilling isn't necessary — just move the soil enough to allow new plant roots to settle in and water to get through. Test your soil (you can buy a testing kit at most garden retailers) to see if it needs help, and add amendments if needed. At the very least, work some compost in where your plants will be growing.

If you'll be using a cold frame or a hoop, set it up early so it's ready to go when you need it. That way, you won't risk damaging plants and roots once they begin to grow.

### Pick Your Plants

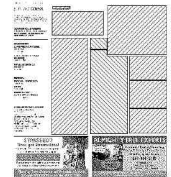
Starting with transplants will buy you lots of time. Since these plants are six weeks or older when you put them in the ground, you'll harvest sooner than if you start from seed. Buy transplants from an established grower, in biodegradable, environmentally friendly pots. You'll find fall varieties selected for your geographic region at local garden retailers.

Here are some top crops for fall planting:

■ **Top bunch collards** — This hybrid is heavy yielding, early maturing and more uniform than traditional varieties. It grows best in full sun, tolerates partial shade, is rich in vitamins and sweetened by frost. Space transplants 36 inches apart.

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

■ **Winterbor kale** — This nutritious,



leafy green is a vigorous producer that endures winter easily. Cut the outer leaves so that the center can continue growing. Space transplants 12 inches apart.

■ **Early-dividend broccoli** — Popular, productive and easy to grow, this broccoli is high in fiber and calcium. Space transplants 18 inches apart.

■ **Mustard greens** — Offering spicy leaves, this is a very fast-growing, nutritious vegetable and always tastes sweeter when nipped by frost. Space plants 12 inches

apart.

■ **Bonnie hybrid cabbage** — Grows large, round, blue-green heads. Cabbage is especially high in beta-carotene, vitamins C and K and fiber.

Get started now to ensure your fall harvest is healthy and hefty. With preparation, the right plants and some diligence, you can count on fresh, low-cost produce well into fall.

— ARA CONTENT



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August is the perfect time to plant garden crops that will flourish through fall into winter, such as broccoli, kale, cabbage, spinach and collards.