

Grow Your Own Fall and Winter Harvest

With a little extra planning and care, you can enjoy fresh vegetables from your garden most of the year! Many cool-season crops produce well in the fall and even into winter in the mild climate of Southwest BC.

With some protection, cool-weather crops can be harvested throughout the winter, and some fall-planted crops (eg. broccoli, carrots, and onions) will grow slowly through the winter and be ready to harvest early in the spring.

PLAN AHEAD

Good planning leads to success, so choose cultivars that are well suited to fall and winter production, and give proper care to your plants. Plan to plant in mid-to late summer, once spring crops have been harvested and garden space becomes available.

Since weather varies greatly from year to year, especially in fall and winter, so can your growing conditions. A crop that struggles one year due to an unusually early freeze or an abnormally cold winter may thrive in a milder year. Be willing to experiment, and don't give up if your results some years are less than ideal.

CHOOSING A LOCATION

The first key to a successful fall or winter garden is choosing the best location.

- Choose an area that gets as much sun as possible during short days, such as a south-facing slope.
- Avoid planting in a spot that is prone to early frost (for example, at the bottom of a hill) or exposed to the wind.
- Good drainage is essential, so raised beds are best. If your soil doesn't drain well, amend it with organic matter such as compost.
- If possible, place your garden where it is easily accessible. It's no fun to slog through winter's mud and cold rain to harvest your crops.

WHEN TO PLANT

For fall and winter harvest, crops should be planted between Mid June and early September depending on the crop in question. Plants need time to mature before cold weather and short days curtail growth. But, if you plant too early, the young plants might wilt in the heat or mature too soon. Some of the most rewarding crops grow quickly and can be harvested 3-6 weeks after planting. So, look for quick maturing cultivars when you can. The seeds of many fall crops can be sown directly in the garden after the soil is prepared for seeding. But you can get a head start of 2-3 weeks by planting vegetable transplants. To continue harvesting through winter, some crops require protection after the first frost has occurred, and others should do nicely without protection in an average southcoast winter.

WHEN TO PLANT FOR EARLY SPRING HARVEST OF OVER-WINTERED VEGGIES

Crops that go through the winter in the mild climate of southwestern BC should be well established, but not mature, when the cold weather hits. The exception are root crops (eg. carrots and leeks) since they are insulated in the ground for the winter, almost like cold storage. Most winter crops should be started between June and early August, with a few exceptions that may need to be started even earlier, be sure to read your seed packages and planting charts.

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PLANTING TIPS

- Before planting, prepare the soil by restoring nutrients removed by spring and summer crops. A light layer of compost, sea soil, aged manure, or an application of an organic fertilizer, boosts soil nutrients in preparation for another crop.
- Winter protection can be provided in the form of a cold frame, cloche or greenhouse plastic stretched over a frame for support.
- Each crop has their own specific timing and needs. Refer to plant labels and seed packages for detailed information on each crop.
- To reduce insect and disease problems, remember to practice crop rotation. This is when you avoid planting crops where a related vegetable was growing previously. For example, put broccoli in a spot vacated by peas, not by cabbage.

VEGGIES TO GROW FOR FALL HARVEST

- Arugula
- Beets
- Cabbage (must be started in late spring)
- Cilantro
- Lettuce
- Mesclun
- Pac choi
- Parsley
- Radish
- Scallions
- Sorrel (Must be started in late spring)
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Turnips

VEGGIES TO GROW FOR LATE FALL AND WINTER HARVEST

- Broad-beans
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Chervil
- Radicchio and endive
- Cilantro
- Corn salad or mache
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Leeks (must be started in early spring)
- Mesclun (with some protection)
- Mustards
- Pac choi
- Parsley
- Parsnips (must be started in late spring)
- Radish
- Rutabaga (start in early summer)
- Sorrel (start in late spring)
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Turnips

CROPS TO GROW TO OVERWINTER FOR LATE WINTER OR EARLY SPRING HARVEST

- Sprouting broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Garlic
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Leeks
- Radish