

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



January 21, 2023

Taking Advantage of Three Gardening Seasons

How can more vegetables be grown during more months of the year? By selecting vegetable crops suited to the seasons of the year, the gardening period is extended. Drawing a planting plan on paper identifies which vegetable to grow and when to plant it. This helps with determining the number of seeds and transplants needed. In the planning process, include crops to grow in the spring, summer, and fall in the same garden. This involves harvesting the crop when mature, removing those plants, and planting the next crop in a timely manner.

Starting with late winter to late spring, plant cool-season crops. These plants grow best with relatively cool air temperatures (50 to 65 degrees F) and produce their vegetative growth during spring's short, cool days. These crops include peas, beets, radishes, kale, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, and spinach. If they are planted too late in the spring, summer heat reduces their quality by forcing some to flower and form seeds (bolt), and others to develop off flavors, bitterness, poor texture, and low yields. Lettuce will bolt and develop bitter flavors in the heat.

Spinach and peas can be directly seeded in the garden in mid-to-late February. Plant beet, collard, carrot, radish, kale, and lettuce seeds into the garden in March along with onion

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sets. In addition, potato seed pieces and cabbage transplants can be planted around March 15.

Around the end of March, plant transplants of broccoli and cauliflower into the garden.

Plant spring garden crops together in order to plant fall vegetables in the same area later. When doing this, however, do not plant closely related vegetables in the same rows in the fall because of possible disease and insect carryover from the spring crops.

Also, a word of caution in preparing the soil for spring crops, wait until the soil is workable and dry enough to prevent the formation of wet clods. Do not work the soil when it is wet. Doing so ruins the soil texture and results in compacting the soil. This may cause the desired planting dates to be delayed, but that is better than compacting the soil.

In addition, do not use organic mulches such as straw in early spring. Rather, let as much sunlight as possible reach the soil to warm it. After late April, use mulch to conserve soil moisture and help prevent weeds.

The summer garden includes a variety of crops, some harvested during the summer months and others continuing to bear into fall. Generally, summer crops are planted during the cool days through the warmer days when the danger of frost is past. The summer garden's crops should begin to produce when the harvest from the spring garden ends.

Summer garden vegetables consist of cool-season crops seeded or transplanted before the danger of frost is past but can endure hot weather at harvest times. This includes heat tolerant lettuce cultivars and quick maturing crops like radishes.

In addition, there are warm-season crops seeded or transplanted after the average frost-free date around April 20 for the summer garden. Warm-season crops require warm soil and air temperatures for vegetative growth and fruiting. These include green beans, pole beans,

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sweet corn, cucumber, okra, southern peas, watermelons, summer squash such as zucchini, and winter squash such as acorn squash. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, and melons are transplanted after the danger of frost is past which may be the last week of April to the first week of May.

Gardening doesn't have to end with your summer-grown crops since some vegetables are suitable for late summer planting. Plan to follow your spring and summer gardens with a fall garden. Plant crops according to your plan by grouping the taller vegetables together to avoid shading shorter ones. To encourage good germination in the summer, fill each seed furrow with water and let it soak in. Keep the soil moist until seeds have germinated.

Fall vegetables are harvested after early September. They consist of two types: the last succession plantings of warm-season crops in early July, such as bush beans, tomato transplants, pepper plants, and cool-season crops which grow well during the cool fall days and withstand frost. Summer squash can be planted up to August 15.

Cool night temperatures slow growth, so crops take longer to mature in the fall compared to the summer. Keep this slower pace in mind when checking seed catalogs for the average days to maturity. Some of the best quality vegetables are produced during fall's warm days and cool nights. These environmental conditions add sugar to cole crops and crispness to carrots.

The following vegetables can be successfully seeded or transplanted for fall harvest: beets, bib lettuce, carrots, collards, bush green beans, leaf lettuce, mustard greens, parsnips, radishes, rutabaga, spinach, and turnips. Broccoli and cabbage transplants placed into the garden by August 15 will usually yield a sweet crop in the fall.

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The 'Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky' publication (ID-128), found at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID128/ID128.pdf>, provides the earliest and latest dates for either seeding or transplanting vegetables into the garden. For more information about vegetable gardening, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Remember to rotate closely related crops every 3 years. The following groups of vegetables are closely related and are subject to the same diseases and insect problems.

- beets, Swiss chard, and spinach
- cabbage, cauliflower, kale, collards, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, turnips, and mustard
- peas, broad beans, snap beans, and lima beans
- potatoes, eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers
- pumpkins, squash, watermelons, cucumbers, and muskmelons

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