

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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HORTICULTURE EDUCATION
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Grow Vegetables from Early Spring through Fall
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How can I grow the most vegetables for my family? Whether your garden space is large or small, take advantage of all three growing seasons in western Kentucky. The key is to match the growing requirement of the vegetable with the temperatures of the season. With a little planning, growing vegetables in late winter and fall in addition to the summer favorites increases the amount of produce.

Start with cool-season vegetables which are planted and harvested from late winter to late spring. 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. 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, carrot, collard, 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. Then, around the end of March, place broccoli and cauliflower transplants into the garden.

Cluster spring garden crops together so that the area can be prepared for planting fall vegetables when they stop producing or the quality is low. Remember to avoid planting closely related vegetables in the same rows in the fall because of possible disease and insect carryover from the spring crops.

Don't be discouraged if the desired planting dates are delayed in the early spring because the soil in the garden is too wet to plant. If the soil is worked wet, vegetable production may be decreased. Wait to till the soil until it is dry enough so that it does not form wet clods.

Another tip for early spring gardening is to avoid using organic mulches such as straw. Rather, let as much sunlight as possible reach the soil to warm it. After late April, use mulches to conserve soil moisture and help prevent weeds.

The summer garden contains a variety of crops, some harvested during the summer months and others continuing to produce into fall. Generally, summer crops are planted during the cooler days of late spring 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 comes to an end.

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

Warm-season crops are seeded or transplanted after the average frost-free date around April 20. This later planting prevents slow germination due to cool soil temperatures and frost

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injury to emerging plants. Warm-season crops require warm soil and air temperatures for vegetative growth and fruiting. These include green beans, pole beans, sweet corn, cucumber, okra, southern peas, watermelons, summer squash such as zucchini, and winter squash such as acorn squash. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, 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.

Plan to follow the summer gardens with a fall garden. The fall vegetable harvest may start around early September. Fall gardening consists of two types: the last plantings of warm-season crops, such as bush beans and summer squash, and the beginning of cool-season crops again which grow well during the cool fall days and withstand frost. To encourage good germination in the summer, fill the seed furrow with water and let it soak in. Keep the soil moist until the seeds have germinated.

Note that cool night temperatures slow growth, so crops take longer to mature in the fall than in 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.

The 'Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky' publication (ID-128) provides the earliest and latest dates for either seeding or transplanting vegetables into the garden. For more

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information about vegetable gardening, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

The following groups of vegetables listed are closely related and subjected to the same diseases and insect problems and should not be planted right after each other: 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; and pumpkins, squash, watermelons, cucumbers, and muskmelons.

Upcoming Event:

“Getting the Most Out of Your Vegetable Garden” presentation is at the Daviess County Public Library on February 18 at 2:00 p.m. during the opening of the Seed Library with the partnership of the Green River Area Extension Master Gardener Association.

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