

# Prepare Now for Fall Gardens

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

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We are in the middle of the Dogs Days of summer but the month of August signals the start of the fall gardening season. Rainfall over the summer season has been fairly decent and we have been fortunate that daytime temperatures have remained south of the 100-degree mark thus far.

During a conversation with several of my Master Gardener friends last week at the Horticulture Demonstration Garden, there were exchanges of who was planting what during August to start off the fall gardening season. Experienced gardeners know that late summer and fall

weather favors more productive growth than the harsher spring climate.

If the heat of the Texas summer put a fizzle on your gardening enthusiasm, try some cool season vegetables. Not only does the taste of many fall grown vegetables excel that of spring crops, fall gardening can reinvigorate the spirit.

Many vegetables will have a longer harvest period than those planted in the spring as they mature during the cooler temperatures of the fall season in contrast to spring crops

maturing as the summer heat sets in. In fact, fall grown vegetables have better flavor and are of higher quality than spring crops.

Even though we're still struggling through the warmth of late summer, novice gardeners may overlook the fact that here in Galveston County, August and September are times to plant many of the popular fall vegetable crops such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, beans, okra, and squash.

Before discussing the how-to's of establishing a fall



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garden from scratch, I should address a common gardening situation. What should you do with your spring-planted tomatoes, peppers, etc.? Is it best to take them out now or start over?

Well, it's not always easy to decide whether or not to terminate a relatively successful spring garden, or try to carry it through until the first killing frost in the fall. If your plants are still vigorous and relatively healthy looking, it may be satisfactory to carry them through the fall season.

I recommend that gardeners in this area critically evaluate the quality of their spring-planted crops. If your plants have disease or insect problems or if they have simply fizzled or petered out, then start with new plants. This is especially true for tomatoes and squash. Okra, eggplants and peppers (especially hot peppers) can be readily carried over if they are still in good vigor.

In starting a new garden, the home gardener should consider several items prior to establishing a fall garden. A light application of nitrogen fertilizer may be warranted given generous rainfall over most areas of the county.

Vegetables adapted to fall gardens can be divided into four groups based on their tolerance to freezing temperatures. The first group, which should be planted now, includes warm season vegetables that are adapted to fall gardens but killed by frost. I'll discuss the other three groups as their planting dates approach.

As with spring gardening, the best practice is to use transplants for certain vegetable crops, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, etc. During the critical adjustment after planting, it is almost an absolute necessity to provide transplants with protection from excessive heat for a while after they have been planted. The sudden exposure of tender transplants that have grown under greenhouse conditions to the hot sun and blasting winds can result in a quick death.

To get started out on the right track, make plans to attend our upcoming educational program entitled "Fall Vegetable Gardening Workshop" on Saturday, August 16, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office at 4102-B Main Street (FM 519) inside Carbide Park in La Marque.

Luke Stripling will serve as our program speaker and is a Certified Texas Master Gardener. Luke has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and hands-on experience on home vegetable gardening. He will provide information on a variety of topics including soil preparation, types of vegetables that do well during the fall and winter season, variety selection, fertilization, and pest control.

All programs are conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office at 4102-B Main Street (FM 519) inside Carbide Park in La Marque, and are free to the public except when noted. However, we ask that you pre-register so we can ensure there is an adequate number of handouts. Visit or contact

the County AgriLife Extension Office (281-534-3413, ext. 12) or e-mail your request ([GALV3@wt.net](mailto:GALV3@wt.net)) to make your reservation.

Successful fall gardening begins much earlier than the official start of the fall season. Proper timing is probably the most important factor in successful fall gardening. Regardless of variety selected or cultural practices used, if a gardener does not do the right thing at the right time, his or her success rate will decrease.

If you get started this month, fall will be a great time to garden in Texas—I will be sowing sweet corn and cucumbers this week to start off my fall vegetable season.

