

Begin preparations now for fall gardens

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

The month of August signals the start of the fall gardening season. Experienced gardeners know that late summer and fall weather favors more productive growth than the harsher spring climate.

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 fact, fall-grown vegetables have better flavor and are of higher quality than spring crops.

Even though we're still struggling through the heat 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-tos of establishing a fall 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 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 might be satisfactory to carry them through the fall season.



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Even though we're still struggling through the heat of late summer, novice gardeners might overlook the fact that August signals the start of the fall gardening season in Galveston County.

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. If the fall garden follows a spring garden where adequate fertilization practices have been used, in most cases little, if any, fertilizer need to be applied prior to planting.

However, with the heavy rainfalls that have occurred in

many areas of the county over the spring and summer, soil nitrogen level might be low and a light application of nitrogen fertilizer might be warranted.

Generally speaking, about one-half to one pound of fertilizer, such as ammonium sulphate (21-0-0), per hundred square feet of garden area should be applied by broadcasting it over the surface and tilling it in. (One cup of 21-0-0 weighs about one-half pound.) Later on, if new leaves are pale-green in color and plant growth is sluggish, a second application of fertilizer, applied between the rows and watered in, should be adequate.

Vegetables adapted to fall gardens can be divided into four groups based on their tolerance to freezing tempera-



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tures. 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.

For best yields, each of the following vegetables, which belongs to the first planting group, can be planted now until the date indicated in parenthesis: pepper, southern peas, summer squash, and tomato (Sept. 1); snap bush bean, wax bush bean, collards, cucumber, okra and sweet corn (Sept. 10).

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.

Fall is a great time to garden in Texas, but you must get started now!

