

It's Time to Plant Your Fall Vegetable Garden

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



Cooler mornings in October make it a joy to get out and work in the home vegetable garden. Several delicious and nutritious vegetables, including broccoli (shown above), can be grown and harvested over the fall and winter gardening season.

PHOTO BY **Herman Auer**

At the end of a long, warm summer, we usually get a few teaser cool fronts to whet our appetites for weather conditions more pleasing to plants and humans alike. While daytime temperatures are still on the warm side, night time temperatures are quite pleasant. Much cooler temperatures over the next several days will make it a joy to get out and work in the home vegetable garden, and better yet, plant an array of delicious and nutritious vegetables that will thrive in the fall-planted garden. Indeed, some of our favorite vegetables can be

grown here with the arrival of cooler weather conditions. Now, for some of the cool-season vegetables you can try: My gardening friends know that broccoli is at the top of my list for vegetables to grow in the fall garden. Broccoli is an easy to grow and productive fall vegetable. You can plant transplants that are available at area nurseries now through mid-November. I planted Packman broccoli two weeks ago and the plants have started to put on new growth. Fall gardening in the Texas Upper Gulf Coast region is exceptional—I

expect to be harvesting broccoli by early December. Broccoli plants should be spaced 12-to-18 inches apart. Closer spacings will produce smaller heads but total production is slightly greater since you have more plants per row or bed.

Broccoli heads are harvested when the largest, unopened flower buds in the head are about the size of the head of a kitchen match. It is common for gardeners growing broccoli for the first time to leave the heads on the plant too long. Never allow the flower buds to begin to open into yellow flowers on broccoli or the quality of the head will be reduced. After the main head is harvested, side florets will be produced, and harvesting can continue for several weeks. These florets often double the production of each plant.

Cauliflower is not as easily grown as broccoli but is still a good choice for your fall garden. Cauliflower should be



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spaced 18-to-24 inches apart. Again, closer spacing will greatly reduce the size of the head. Cauliflower produces only one head, so after harvesting, remove the entire plant from your garden to make way for planting something else.

For white heads, blanch the cauliflower by pulling the leaves up over the head when it is about the size of a silver dollar. Fasten the leaves with a clothespin or twine and check the head frequently. Harvest before the curds of the head start to separate.

Broccoli and cauliflower are heavy feeders and should receive supplemental applications of fertilizer while they are growing—this is called sidedressing. Sidedress each plant with 1 tablespoon of general-purpose fertilizer (such as 21-0-0) sprinkled about 3 inches out from the main stem every three weeks, and water regularly under dry weather conditions. Fast, vigorous growth results in larger heads and best quality.

Other excellent vegetables recommended for fall gardens include cabbage, kale and collards. All of these can also be transplanted now through mid-November.

Garlic may be planted now through mid-November by pressing individual cloves into the soil with the big end down so that the tip of the garlic is about 1/4 inch below the soil surface. Space the cloves 4-6

inches apart in rows spaced about 15 inches apart.

Root crops such as turnips and beets are excellent choices for the cool-season vegetable garden. I recommend direct seeding of root crops into the garden. Although transplants are available, the tiny root the seed first sends out eventually develops into the edible vegetable. If this is damaged, as generally happens when you transplant seedlings, the result is a deformed root.

Once the seeds of root crops come up, the seedlings must be thinned to the right spacing, or the roots will not develop properly. The following are some commonly planted root crops and the proper spacing: beets (3-4 inches apart); turnips (3 inches); and carrots (2 inches).

If you seek rapid gratification or feel gardening is a challenge then try radishes—they are easy to grow and some varieties can be harvested just 22 days from planting. Even the most horticultural-challenged gardener should be able to grow radishes. The most likely reason for failure to produce a crop of radishes is overcrowding of plants (thin to a 2-to-3 inch spacing, depending on variety, when seedlings are less than 1 inch tall).

Other vegetables that can be planted this month include celery, Chinese cabbage, endive, leeks, lettuce, mustard, peas (English and snow), shallots,

Swiss chard, and many herbs such as thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, French tarragon, lavender, chives, cilantro, dill, mints and parsley.

