

# It's Time to Plant Late-summer and Fall Vegetable Gardens

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



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

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

We are in the middle of the Dogs Days of summer but the month of August signals the start of the late-summer and fall gardening seasons. Since day time temperatures are still dancing around the 90-degree mark this week, you may be wondering about my sanity given the topic.

During a conversation with

several of my Master Gardener friends last week at the Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, there were exchanges of who was planting what during August for the late-summer and fall gardening seasons. Experienced gardeners know that late summer and fall weather favors more productive growth than the spring

gardening season.

August is a transitional time in the vegetable garden. While cool-season planting begins in earnest next month, some of the more heat-tolerant cool-season vegetables, such as the cole crops, can be planted into the garden now. And because our first frosts generally don't



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arrive until late November or early December, we can also plant early maturing warm-season vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers for fall production. Visit area nurseries to find out what vegetable transplants and seeds they have available to plant.

It is important to prepare beds properly before planting. Clear the site of all weeds or other vegetation. Turn the soil with a shovel, fork or tiller to a depth of at least 8 inches and then apply a 2-to-4-inch layer of organic matter—dried grass clippings, aged manure or compost. This helps to maintain a high level of organic matter in the soil, which encourages a strong, healthy root system and improves drainage.

Fertilizer can be sprinkled on top of the organic matter. I also recommend applying a nitrogen fertilizer. 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.

Mix the organic matter and fertilizer thoroughly into the soil. Turn the soil by digging with a shovel, garden fork or tiller until the added materials are evenly distributed. If you are not gardening in raised beds, form the soil into raised rows about 8 inches high and up to 2-to-

4 feet wide, with narrow walkways between them. If you are gardening in containers, use a quality potting mix, and fertilize with balanced soluble or slow-release fertilizers used according to label directions.

Insects and diseases have had all summer to build up their populations, and insects such as whiteflies, stink bugs, aphids and caterpillars are commonly seen this time of year. Because insect and disease pressures are often greater in late summer and early fall than in spring, watch plants carefully for problems and use appropriate control measures promptly when needed.

August 1 through September 1 is the time to plant tomato and bell pepper transplants for fall production. Spring-planted tomato plants rarely survive the summer in decent shape, and new transplants are generally used for the fall crop. If your pepper plants from the spring are still in reasonably good shape, they will often produce an excellent fall crop once the weather begins to cool down (this also goes for eggplants). Keep them well-fertilized and protected from insects and diseases.

Fall snap beans often produce better than those planted in spring. This is because as the fall snap beans come into production, temperatures begin to cool down, while in spring, the weather gets increasingly hotter as the beans produce their crop. Snap beans are one of the easiest and most reliable vegetables and are especially appropri-

ate for children's gardens. Snap beans can be planted now through September 10 so they will come into bloom after the weather begins to turn cooler. The window for planting lima beans is closing; lima beans can be planted through the end of the month. Peas should be planted from September 15 through December 15.

Cole crops to be planted from transplants include cabbage (Sept. 15 - Nov. 15), cauliflower, collards and kale (now through Sept.15), kohlrabi (September 1 - Oct.15). Cole is the Old English word for cabbage, and these days cole crops is used to refer to this group of closely related vegetables (we still use the word when we refer to cabbage salad as coleslaw).

Broccoli is one of the best and easiest vegetables to grow of the cole crop group. Seeds can be planted now through early September and may be planted into pots or flats and transplanted into the garden, or direct seeded into the garden where they will grow. Plant transplants 12 to 18 inches apart into well-prepared beds. The closer spacing will produce smaller heads but will provide greater total production.

To obtain a full list of types of vegetables, vegetable varieties and planting dates recommended for Galveston County, send an e-mail request to galvcountrymgs@gmail.com.

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

