

## Fall is Vegetable Weather!

With cooler days approaching, many home gardens are harvesting their summer vegetables with a heavy heart, knowing the season is ending. Proper care of summer vegetables can long extend their season, while new plants, most often thought of as spring vegetables, are ready once again to be planted.

Some plants in your early fall gardens are simply extensions on your summer garden. Tomatoes, peppers, okra, eggplant and sweet potatoes may continue to grow and put on fruit through the cooler months. With these established plants, gardeners should be careful not to overwater. By now these plants should have a well-established root system and won't need the same amount of irrigation they received in the intense Kansas summer days. They won't need additional fertilization either.

The biggest concern with these summer vegetables will be frost, which will likely end their production. To protect against a minor frost (especially an early frost), cover them with a breathable material. You can purchase row covers or use what you have. Sheets, towels and cardboard all work if they are placed in such a way as to not break stems.

Now to plant something new! Most of the plants you had in your spring garden are perfect for your fall garden. Cucumbers, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, summer squash, leafy greens, beets, carrots and beans call all be grown in the fall. One plant that isn't well suited for fall is peas. The cold temperatures they require for seed germination can't be met in early fall.

Plants in the Brassicacea family (broccoli, cauliflower and brussels sprouts) should be planted by seed, rather than transplants, and thinned to one plant per foot of row when there are about half an inch tall. For beets and carrots, they will need adequate moisture in order to emerge from the soil. A sprinkle of compost or even sand may aid in their ability to break the soil surface by preventing soil crusting.

Leafy greens such as lettuce, spinach and kale are a fall favorite for many gardeners. Lettuce is extremely frost sensitive, showing marginal burning with even a light frost. Fortunately, the inner leaves are usually safe making it possible to harvest this salad favorite later than other greens. Spinach and kale are excellent choices for the fall and have some success overwintering. Enjoy eating both in the fall but don't harvest all the leaves. By allowing some leaves to remain and applying a light mulch they will likely reappear in your spring garden!

Care of a fall garden is like other times of the year. Although many parts of Kansas receive adequate rainfall in the fall it is important to monitor your soil's moisture. Many of the cool season crops planted in the fall can tolerate heat if there is enough moisture available. Adding organic matter prior to planting fall vegetables may increase the likelihood that your soil will dry out. Instead, save this application for late fall. Brassicas and leafy greens need fertilization two weeks after transplanting or four weeks after sowing the seeds. Four tablespoons of a high-nitrogen all-purpose garden fertilizer per ten feet of row will help ensure lush vegetative growth. Other fall vegetables will not require any additional fertilization.

Planting times for all fall crops vary greatly with some needing a late July start and others tolerating a mid-September initiation. For a complete vegetable garden calendar, reference K-State's Kansas Garden Guide. You will also find detailed care information broken down by crop. Don't let fall pass by without continuing everyone's favorite thing about summer—delicious, fresh produce!

You can purchase a copy of the Kansas Garden Guide in your local Extension Office or find it online: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/S51.pdf>