



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot For week of July 6, 2009

Preparing for Late-Season Gardens

Spring-grown vegetables are mostly gone now. And our summer vegetables are now in full production. It's time to start thinking about our late summer or fall garden. Our ancestors said that we need to plant pumpkins and black-eye peas on the 4th of July. There's some merit to those wisdoms.

Fall gardens, however, are considerably more difficult to grow than spring gardens. Problems include extreme heat, drought, difficulty in seed germination, insects, diseases and weeds. Successful fall gardens require close attention and extra care from planting to harvest.

The following tips should prove helpful:

Select varieties carefully. The best spring varieties are not always the best fall varieties.

Spring varieties germinate in cool, moist conditions and mature as the days grow drier, warmer and longer. Fall varieties have just the opposite growing conditions: long, dry days at first and short, cool, moist days as they mature. Check the specific variety to see if they are appropriate for late-season gardens.

Plant at the proper time. Green beans, tomatoes and other warm-season vegetables cannot withstand frost and must mature before they are killed by frost. Greens, broccoli, and other cool-season vegetables will withstand frost and their harvest may sometimes continue several weeks after the first frost.

Most seed packets and variety descriptions in catalogs estimate the days from planting to maturity. Add about 10 days to this estimate because of the cooler, shorter days in the fall. Subtract the total number of days required for the vegetable to grow from the date you want it to

begin maturing to find the latest planting date. Plan for your warm-season vegetables to mature at least two weeks ahead of the frost date, while vegetables able to withstand frost can mature up to two weeks after the first frost.

For Limestone County, we can anticipate our first frost around mid to late October in a 'Normal' year (if such thing as a 'Normal' year exists).

The chart below will give a rough guideline. Again, keep in mind that these dates are estimates; and Mother Nature can trick us with either early or late frosts.

	Planting Interval	Days to First Harvest	Length of Harvest Season
Beans, Bush, Snap	July 15 to Aug.15	52 to 60 days	2 weeks or more
Broccoli	July 15 to Aug. 15	60 to 75 days	3 weeks
Cabbage	July 5 to August 15	60 to 75 days	3 weeks
Cauliflower	July 15 to Aug. 15	65 to 75 days	4 to 30 weeks
Cucumbers	July 1 to August 1	50 to 55 days	3 to 6 weeks
Leaf Lettuce	July 1 to Sept. 15	40 to 50 days	4 to 6 weeks
Potatoes	July 1 to July 30	90 to 110 days	4 months
Radish	August 1 to Sept.15	25 to 30 days	3 weeks
Spinach	Sept. 10 to Sept 20	40 to 50 days	3 weeks
Summer Squash	July 15 to Aug. 15	40 to 50 days	6 weeks
Tomatoes	July 1 to August 1	70 to 80 days	8 weeks
Turnip Greens	August 1 to Sept. 30	30 to 40 days	Several weeks
Turnip Roots	August 1 to Sept. 15	40 to 65 days	6 months

Maintain moisture during germination. Vegetable seed will not germinate without moisture. High fall temperatures and sparse rainfall contribute to difficult conditions for seed germination. Water soils amply before planting fall vegetables. Plant seed 1/4 inch deeper than you would plant spring vegetables. Watering before the seed is planted will increase available moisture and reduce crusting. Deeper planting will reduce chances of the seed drying out.

Care for fall gardens properly. Fall gardens require more attention than spring gardens. Insects, diseases, weeds and drought problems are all more severe in the late summer and fall. Plants are also more difficult to establish in the hotter weather. Check your garden frequently. Remove weeds while they are small. Control insects and diseases before these problems become severe.

Use fertilizer. Fertilizer applied to gardens in the spring may not be available for use by fall vegetables. This is especially true of nitrogen, which tends to leach quickly from garden soils. Apply nitrogen to fall vegetables as you would to spring vegetables.

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