

# Consider a vegetable garden this fall in PNW

**S**eptember and October in western Oregon is usually still very warm with daytime high temperatures often in the 80s, while much of the country experiences their first frost or freeze. With the current hot, dry weather pattern it seems this fall will be great for a fall vegetable garden.

This lovely fall regional weather condition for the Pacific Northwest (PNW) is caused by the moderating effect of the Pacific Ocean that keeps us warm in the fall and mild in winter. Understanding this climatic feature should encourage you to extend the gardening season into fall or, with a hoop house, even into winter.

Learning these nuances of temperature and climate in our coastal region can make you a better gardener by putting you in touch with our seasonal norms.

Western Oregon is an excellent place to grow fall vegetables that tolerate cool temperatures with some short periods of frosty weather. These plants include peas, spinach, lettuce, kale and carrots.

If your garden is an in-ground plot and you start plants from seed, you will need to plant in August when the soil is still warm to get plants up and established before the cool nights slow down their growth rate.

There is another group of plants that can also be planted in August that will get established in the fall but will grow slowly during late fall and winter. Leeks, onions, garlic, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and cabbage will all tolerate frost



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*Extension Spotlight*

and some freezing weather once established after about one to two months in the ground. These plants grow slowly during fall and winter and become productive as temperatures warm into spring.

If you have raised beds or a garden plot, you can transplant starts into the beds in late August or September, and the plants will mature by spring. To be very successful in winter gardening, put up plastic hoop covers over your garden or raised beds to keep the rain off, and provide a few extra degrees of warmth to the soil promoting additional growth.

Climatically the most limiting factor of winter gardening in our area is excess rainfall not cold temperatures.

In our maritime climate, soil temperature is the real key to when you should plant your fall season garden. With our hot dry summers, soil is still very warm into September. However, as the days get shorter going into fall and the first rains arrive, soil temperature will fall rapidly, making seed germination more difficult.

That is why it is important to only plant cool season crops from seed in August or early September.

Use transplants if possible to get a faster start if you wait until mid-September.

To garden more effectively in fall, use raised beds. Raised beds have better drainage than in-ground gardens, they dry out faster and stay warm longer into the fall. If you have an in-ground garden and your site is well drained, you may be able to grow cool season crops through the winter, but without a hoop house or cold frame be prepared for a few problems.

When you transition from your summer garden to a fall garden and you are preparing the soil, make sure you add additional compost or nutrients to off-set the soil nutrients removed by your summer harvest. If you are not going to plant a fall or winter garden, it is important to add compost and plant a cover crop on your in-ground garden plot in September when the soil is still warm and the cover crop can get a good start to protect your soil over winter.

The worst thing you can do for your garden plots, whether in-ground or raised beds, is to leave the soil bare over winter. Winter rain can cause serious compaction to your garden soil and leach a large percentage of the nutrients left in the soil after the gardening season ends.

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