

# Fall gardens are great for veggies

**CHRIS RUSCH**  
Master Gardener

**Q**uestion: Can you give me some information on easy to grow vegetables for the fall garden?

**Answer:** Planting a fall garden is a terrific way to extend your access to fresh garden produce. Salad greens like lettuce, spinach, arugula and Chinese cabbage are all easy to grow. Salad arugula varieties like Speedy and Roquette are fast to mature and frost-hardy. Spinach is a great addition to any fall garden. Spinach can be picked small for salads, and when the leaves are large, they are delicious in a stir fry. Chinese cabbage is quick to mature and an abundant producer. It makes a great addition to any salad. Lettuce can be grown almost year round in our mild climate. Look for lettuce mixes and gourmet salad blends for a constant supply of fresh greens during the winter.

Root crops like radishes and turnips are both worth a try. Turnips and radishes look rather similar. Turnips are grown for both greens and roots. Turnips like Tokyo Cross have a delectable sweet and smooth flesh with tender greens. Golden Ball turnips are outstanding cooked and mashed with butter. The roots grow quickly and keep well. Radish varieties like Crunchy Crimson and Roxanne only take 25 days to mature!

Usually we think of peas as a spring garden crop, but they are a hardy cool season crop that can be grown in the fall as well. Snap peas like Sugar Ann are an early and easy-to-grow snap pea. It is a non-climbing bush type, and is delicious fresh or cooked.

The first key to a successful fall or winter garden is location. Much depends on your garden's microclimate. Microclimates vary from yard to yard (for example, urban gardens tend to be warmer than rural gardens) and within a single yard.



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Choose the warmest location you have. Don't plant in a spot that is prone to early frost (for example, at the bottom of a hill) or exposed to the wind. Look for an area that gets as much sun as possible during the short days of autumn and winter, such as a south-facing slope. If possible, place your garden where it is easily accessible. It's no fun to slog through winter's mud and cold rain to harvest your crops.

For crops that will be in the garden during the rainy season, good drainage is essential. Raised beds are best. If your soil doesn't drain well, amend it with organic matter such as compost.

Prepare the soil by restoring nutrients depleted by spring and summer crops. A light layer of compost or aged manure, or a small application of a complete chemical or organic fertilizer, boosts soil nutrients in preparation for another crop.

You can reduce the time to maturity by two to five days by pre-sprouting seeds indoors. Almost any crop can benefit from pre-sprouting. To pre-sprout seeds, place them between two layers of damp paper towels. Place the towels in a plastic bag and keep them in a warm place until the seeds germinate.

Another method is to soak seeds for four hours. Allow the seedlings to reach a length of up to 1 inch. Be careful not to break the roots when planting. You can plant sprouted seeds more deeply than normal to help prevent drying out. Water well until the plants break the soil surface.

You can also increase your planting success by using transplants.



PHOTOS BY CHRIS RUSCH

**Raised beds are a great option for the rainy season, allowing good drainage. Too much moisture can attract pests and plant disease.**

Producing quality transplants in a greenhouse requires healthy seed, a suitable potting mix, clean planting trays, fertilizer and water.

Growing high quality transplants helps get vegetable crops off to a strong start in the field. Seedlings are ready to transplant when they have the first set of true leaves. You can also purchase plants from commercial garden shops, but growing your own plants may be the only way to obtain a new or special variety you want.

If it's hot and sunny when you plant, your young plants will need extra care. Water transplants daily at first. You might need to sprinkle seeds and newly germinated seedlings twice a day.

To keep the soil moist and protect young plants

from the sun, temporarily shade them. Boards and umbrellas make good shade structures. Once young plants are established, you can use a mulch to hold moisture in the soil and control weeds. Irrigate when necessary so the young plants have sufficient moisture.

Protection from incessant rain can extend the life of a winter garden dramatically. Heavy and prolonged rains can saturate the soil, encourage slugs and create an ideal environment for leaf diseases. By covering your winter crops with a cloche, cold frame, row cover, mulch or other product, you can avoid many of these problems and extend the growing season. Cold frames and row covers can protect your plants from frost as well.

With a little planning,



**You can also increase your planting success by using transplants. Growing high quality transplants helps get vegetable crops off to a strong start in the field.**

you can amaze your friends with your garden-fresh vegetables this fall.

*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu).*

*edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*