

# Start now to reap reward of fall vegetables

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**CORVALLIS** – As we settle in at the table of summer’s harvest, savvy gardeners pause long enough to consider the coming season.

“Most folks are familiar with and love summer vegetables, but if you want to maximize your food and nutrition, then growing fall crops is a great strategy,” said Weston Miller, a horticulturist with Oregon State University Extension Service.

The window of opportunity for planting those crops is short – as daylight decreases, it becomes harder and harder to hit it right. So, begin now to tuck seeds or transplants into the soil.

“Yes, it is hot and it might seem counterintuitive to plant now, but if you want to harvest in fall, it’s got to be now,” Miller said. “You just have to take steps to mitigate the heat.”

Plant in morning or evening and make sure to monitor the soil closely so it doesn’t dry out. Water daily, twice if it’s especially hot. Concentrate your efforts on the top couple of inches of soil where seeds are germinating and the small root systems of new plants are getting off to a start.

If the weather turns scorching hot, you may have to resort to shade cloth or Reemay, a very lightweight fabric that allows light and water through but helps keep plants from burning. Some crops like carrots, beets and direct-seeded greens don’t mind having the cloth placed right on top; bigger crops like broccoli and peppers might appreciate having it propped up on the same type of wire or plastic hoops used to make cloches or cold frames.

As you get ready to plant, add about ¼-inch of compost and some organic fertilizer to the soil. Both break down



**Harvest carrots and other vegetables in fall by sowing in July and August.**

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faster in the heat of summer soil than in cooler months and make nutrients available quicker than usual, Miller said. After planting, use a water-soluble fertilizer like fish emulsion on the transplants to get them well established.

Whether to plant seeds or transplants depends on the crop and, to some extent, how you’re going to use it. Plants that do best directly seeded include carrots, parsnips, beets, radish, mustard and arugula. Many crops like kale, chard and lettuce can be sown heavily for “cut and come again” greens. Cut the greens above the crown of the plant when the leaves reach 4 to 6 inches. You can get two to three cuttings if you give them plenty of water and some fish emulsion after each cutting.

All other crops can and should be transplanted for best success. Look for high-quality plants that aren’t root-bound, stunted or off-color.

Once you get the new plants in the ground, don’t dawdle on weed control. Weed once a week for four weeks to keep weeds from competing for water and nutrients as plants get established.

Miller recommends allocating half of your garden space for typical summer

crops like tomatoes, beans and cucumbers and the other half for cool season crops like kale, scallions, carrots, beets and lettuce. “That will give you the most from your garden,” he said.

For more information on extended-season vegetable gardening, refer to these Extension publications: *Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening in the Pacific Northwest* and *Growing Your Own*.