

Autumn Planting

With the arrival of autumn, cool weather is just around the corner. As the saying goes, *the early bird gets the worm*, and if you are an early riser you have already enjoyed the cool morning air.

Some gardens continue to yield warm weather vegetables. You can encourage your crops to continue to produce those tasty vegetables by applying a last application of fertilizer. Remember to water your vegetables thoroughly after applying fertilizer. The cusp of summer and autumn allows us to harvest and enjoy a wide variety of vegetables.

As cooler temperatures embrace our gardens, it's a great time to relax and de-stress by preparing your garden for the chilly months yet to come. Vegetables you may look forward to include all leafy greens (and some reds and purples!), peas and fava beans.

To ready your garden, begin by tilling in some fresh compost combined with peat moss into the existing soil. If you don't have your own compost pile, try adding some Bumper Crop, organic soil conditioner. Add at least three to four inches of new organic matter and turn it over into the top six to ten inches of the garden bed. When adding the compost to the bed, be sure to include bone meal and an organic fertilizer such as Happy Frog's *Jump Start* or a *fish fertilizer*. The addition of soil conditioners provide the benefit of adding nutrients, mildly adjusting the pH level of the soil and providing water retention...a key element to gardening in the desert. For root crops, add some high phosphorous bat guano to your soil. Another option is to add soft rock phosphorous. In order to circumvent sloughing of the skin on root crops, avoid, or at least minimize, the application of manure particularly on carrot and radish crops.

Root Crops

Fall is a great time to plant onions, shallots and garlic. Keep in mind, they will need a minimum of four months to reach maturity. During cold winters, they may take up to five or six months before the plants reach maturity and are ready to be harvested. You may find that your onions have small heads. This is a result of the shorter winter days. In order for onions to form larger heads, they require longer hours of sunlight. However, due to our desert planting season we must plant during the winter months which don't provide the requisite hours our daylight. Brown onions are the strongest and fastest growing of the onion varieties, as well as being the easiest to grow. If you are growing scallions or green onions, they will take up to eight weeks. Other root crops you may wish to consider for our area are: radishes, carrots or sugar beets. By seed, the radishes will take two to three weeks for the round varieties. For the long radish varieties such as the white icicle, they may take up to eight weeks. Carrots require two to three months and beets need three to four months. All these plants prefer full sun in the winter time.

Tip: When growing garlic, pick a few (but not all) leaves and add them to your salad for flavor.

Leafy Greens

If you wish to grow leafy greens, try planting a new crop of lettuce every two to three weeks for successive harvest. For spinach, kale, mustard, collards, etc...they can be cut multiple times during the growing season. The more you use, the more you will need to plant so that your crops are rotating. This will allow you to harvest your greens while allowing previously cut greens to rest and replenish.

Space Savers in Your Garden

If you are working with a small garden space, find creative ways to fit in more plants. By using a fence or wall, you can urge peas to grow upward and plant carrots in front of them. Next, line up onions and garlic, followed by leafy greens such as spinach and swiss chard. It is important to keep in mind that some plants do not get along well. Onions do not perform well when planted with Broccoli, Cabbage, Collards and brasicas. Therefore, be sure to create a barrier, such as the leafy greens, between onions and greens such as broccoli.

Herbs

Now is the time for cilantro and dill to grace the garden once again. There are many herbs that will do well now. Pick your favorite chives, onion or garlic, and include one or more varieties of basil. Be sure to shelter your basil from the freezing cold temperatures. You'll soon be on your way to making fresh, savory red sauce for your pasta! Add a nice cucumber flavor to your salads with burnet or a little spice with fennel. Looking for something soothing and calming? Try chamomile.

Cover Crops

A cover crop is a plant that is grown for the specific purpose of adding nutrients to the soil. Fall is an excellent time to plant a cover crop in your garden. Allow the cover crop to grow for one month and then till it into the soil where it will become a "green manure" adding nutrients to the soil. There are a number of great options for cover crops. Try planting legumes such as buckwheat, fava beans or peas. These cover crops are favorable as they fix nitrogen in the soil and may be grown to harvest, then till into the soil. Once the cover crop has been ploughed under, allow the crop to die before planting your garden. Furthermore, the flowers on the buckwheat will attract bees to help pollenate your garden. Be sure to ask your garden professional about the best cover crop for your garden today!