

Fall Gardening in the Vegetable Patch

Harvesting and Storing Vegetables

- Harvest green tomatoes with whitish color on bottom to ripen indoors. Collect seeds from ripe tomatoes all season. Scoop seeds into jar with water, ferment 3-5 days, rinse flesh off seeds in strainer, dry on paper towel, and place in labeled envelop for storing.
- Harvest potatoes 2 weeks after vines die or are cut to toughen skins, but before fall rains. Dig, dry, and don't wash. Store in a cool (40+ degrees), dark, ventilated location, not in plastic.
- Harvest winter squash at maturity (when thumb nail will not pierce the skin) and before frost (below 28 degrees) as damage may occur. Store in dry, dark, cool location, about 50 degrees.
- Dry bean seeds on the vine until they rattle, or cut damp golden pods to dry inside with no heat or sun.
- Store root vegetables in the ground: Cover carrots, beets, & turnips with 1 to 2 inches sawdust, onions and leeks with several inches of dry leaves, or protect with row cover. Swiss chard, kale and collard generally survive the winter without protection.
- Prune thyme and rosemary and dry the leaves. Hard prune rosemary only if harvesting for skewers.
- Harvest basil before night temperature drops below 50 degrees. Process immediately or put stems in water to hold. Make pesto, or cut, pack into ice cube trays, cover with water, and freeze.

Planting Fall and Winter Vegetables

- The reasons to plant in the fall are: the soil is dry and warm; some crops grow best in cool weather; there are fewer pests; there is less need for watering; and you can have fresh produce during the winter and spring.
- For fall and winter harvests, start beet, broccoli, cabbage, carrot, Chinese cabbage, collard, kale, kohlrabi, rutabaga, and Swiss chard from seeds in July. Seedlings planted in late summer/early fall need at least 4 weeks growth to tolerate winter temperature.
- Plants that can be directly seeded in the fall include: fava beans (Oct.–Nov.), arugula, some onions, and mustard (to mid Oct.); and garlic cloves, point up and 2 to 3 inches deep (October/early November).

Using Season Extenders

Season extenders help small plants grow better and protect the plants from winter cold and severe weather. They include:

- Row covers, cold frames (facing south is best), and cloches that warm the air and protect plants;
- Plastic mulch that warms the soil; and
- Hot beds, cold frames with a heating cable buried 2+ inches below the soil surface, warm both soil and air.

Vegetable Patch Clean-up

Fall cleaning makes spring gardening easier. Remove and dispose of weeds, rotten and immature fruit, dead foliage, and stems for use in the home compost. Pull, cut or prune diseased plants and foliage for commercial composting. Bait slugs and snails to reduce fall and spring populations.

Soil Improvement

Add 2 to 4 inches of leaves, sawdust, or compost as mulch to reduce compaction and erosion, suppress weeds, and regulate soil temperature. October 1 is the target date for planting cover crops which also reduce compaction and erosion and add nutrients when turned into the soil in the spring.

Fall is the ideal time to test soil pH. Collect a soil sample by removing top vegetation or mulch (use clean tools, gloves, and hands), dig down 6 to 8 inches and remove a vertical slice of soil. Mix in a container, transfer ½ cup to a plastic bag for testing. If lime is needed, applications in fall will have the soil ready for planting in the spring. Don't lime potato planting areas, as lime leads to scabby potatoes.

Clackamas Master Gardeners test soil samples for pH at three annual events. Check www.cmastergardeners.org for specifics. Use commercial labs for soil nutrient analysis.

References

OSU Extension publications, extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog

Storing Pumpkin and Winter Squash at Home (EC 1632)

Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening in the Pacific Northwest (PNW 548)

How to build your own raised-bed cloche (EC 1627)

A guide to Collecting Soil Samples for Farms and Gardens (EC 628)

Raised Bed Gardening (FS 270)

Cover Crops for Home Gardens (FS 304)

10-Minute University Handouts, www.cmastergardeners.org

Saving Seed

Starting Your Vegetable Garden

Growing Winter Vegetables

Gardening with Mulches

Raised Bed Gardening

Testing Soil pH

Sheet Mulching

Other

An Introduction to Seed Saving for the Home Gardener (2750e); University of Maine, umaine.edu/publications/2750e

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), or 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For 10-Minute University™ handouts and class schedule, visit www.metromastergardeners.org.

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