



5518 President George Bush Hwy  
Rowlett, TX 75089  
(972) 475-5888  
[www.covingtonnursery.com](http://www.covingtonnursery.com)

# The Fall Vegetable Garden

## Enjoying the Second Season in North Texas

### What is the Fall Garden, and Why Plant One?

As summer rolls in, it's time in North Texas to begin planting our second full garden turn of the year! We're blessed with an exceptionally long season for growing all kinds of tasty vegetables, but most of the plants we love to eat don't produce well throughout the entire growing year. Older plants don't always produce well, plants wear out and stop producing altogether, or simply die outright - or you've harvested the first crop of many of the plants we eat (lettuces, onions, etc.) and they're simply gone! Diseases take their toll, so do the bugs, until finally as July arrives, your garden looks like a disaster, with a few exceptions here and there still in production.

We have two very distinct vegetable gardening seasons in our area. The first season (the spring garden) is planted as early as we can get away with each type of planting to take advantage of mild, mid- and late spring weather during the productive part of the plant's life. The fall garden is different - we plant as early as we can get away with each type of planting during the HOT season, so that - you guessed it - we can take advantage of mild, early to mid-fall weather during the productive part of the plant's life.

The key is to time the PRODUCTION phase (when the plant works size of the edible portions, stores sugars, etc.) to be at its peak during the milder weather.

### Spring Cleaning, Except it Happens in July

The start of the fall garden is a vigorous cleanup. It's time to REMOVE those tired tomatoes, rip OUT the cabbages you left in a corner because the loopers destroyed them, and generally present yourself with a blank slate! It's fine to leave obviously healthy, strong looking plants that are either still productive right now (eggplants, okra, peppers come to mind, first season cantaloupe, watermelons, etc.) or look like they might be this fall, but anything tired, finished, or which has just been a disappointment this year should be ripped out.

Weeds are another constant in the vegetable garden. If you have a deep layer of mulch, you probably don't have a serious weed problem...but if the Bermuda grass has crept in, or "real life" has left you behind on your garden maintenance this spring and the garden looks like a carpet of weeds, it's time to rip those out too. A good, strong 20% vinegar spray with orange oil is an effective herbicide, or Kill-Zall. Neither will affect your new plantings. Give whichever herbicide you use a few days to finish killing undesired vegetation, with resprays as necessary, then cultivate the soil.

## **To Till, or Not To Till?**

Take a look at your growing soil. If you've avoided walking on it, and have sufficient compost content, you may not need to till the garden for the second time this year. If your soil is compacted, through walking or watering, or if you just really need or want to add some fresh compost, run a tiller deeply through the area. A good quick judge would be - do I need a trowel to plant my new young seedlings, or can I make a quick hole with just my hands? If I can answer the latter, tilling this second time is optional.

## **Everything's Backwards**

When planning your crop spacing, locations, and timing for the fall garden, everything's backwards! Instead of planning your cool season harvest to coincide with the planting of your next crop of peppers, or pulling carrots to plant squash, it's quite the other way 'round. Now, you're planning ahead for pulling unproductive peppers in October for that last crop of lettuce, and so forth. There's really no completely wrong way to do it, but optimize the use of your space by trying to time your crop's finish with the new plantings of the next.

## **My Herbs Are Eating My Garden**

It's time to harvest herbs aggressively! Many herbs are going into flower, and these flowers are often not desirable for the growth of the edible portions. Shear oregano, catnip, lavender, thyme, basil, any cilantro that hasn't already burned up, mint, etc. heavily; hang to dry, mince and freeze, or use a food dehydrator (as appropriate) to store any herbs you wish for later use. Most of the named herbs will flush out with tender and flavorful new growth in the mid to late summer, and as we cool down toward the fall.

- Hang To Dry - Many herbs can be simply cut in long stems, tied together, and hung upside down in a cool dry place. Aromatic herbs done this way like oregano and lavender make nice scent additions to the kitchen.
- Mince And Freeze - Some herbs, such as basil, lose flavor dried in an oven or food dehydrator. Finely chop the leaves, pour into ice trays, fill with filtered water, and freeze. Pop the herb-cubes out of the ice trays and put into a double-layer zip-close bag. They're immediately ready for use in sauces, marinades, and so forth. Don't forget the labels!
- Dry In Food Dehydrator - Many herbs can be dried very simply in a low heat setting of a food dehydrator. Once they're thoroughly dried, strip the leaves and put the herbs in a tightly sealed jar or zip-close bag. Label carefully! Crushed leaves look a lot like other crushed leaves!

## **Kill The Bugs - At Least, If They're Bad**

A cleaned-off garden is the perfect time to kill and prevent repeat infestations of the pests that plagued your spring garden. A general-area Spinosad (Captain Jack's Deadbug Brew) spray, or a stout application of diatomaceous earth, put to the vegetable garden soil will kill many of the problem pests, and simple removal of the expended vegetable plantings will rid the garden of many more. Dunk problem ant mounds at this time with a mix of molasses and orange oil.

This is not an automatic step in your garden cleanup! If you've not had serious insect problems in the vegetable garden, there's probably no need to apply even the organic Spinosad application. Any general purpose pesticide, even organic ones, can kill insects you may not have intended to be harmed. Remember, some of the bugs are the good guys that help control the problem pests!

## **Make That Compost**

The cleared vegetation has to go somewhere. Compost heaps are a fantastically practical way to get rid of leftover vegetable trash, and the finished compost can be a real boon to your garden next season, or next year. To heck with saving landfill space, which composting does do - I want my compost! Building productive compost bins is a full-length topic of its own, which we won't go fully into here. But look into it. It's useful, and fun for kids to see how nature recycles everything, if you allow it to.

## **Rotate Your Plantings**

When replanting your vegetables, change their placement in the garden when possible. Most garden pests and diseases are picky and infest only one or two types of vegetable you've planted. Changing the locations in the garden of these plants will reduce the chances of immediate re-infestation. Additionally, different plants have different nutrient needs, and rotating your crop reduces the chance of massively draining a particular soil nutrient below productive levels.

## **Prep New Beds**

It's the easiest time of year to prepare new garden beds or additions. Grass and weeds are more easily killed now than at any other time of the season! Apply either 20% vinegar with orange oil or our Hi-Yield Kill-Zall along the shape of the new bed. It's much, much easier to kill this way than to dig out the grass entirely. Wait three days to till the area - not because the spray will hurt your garden, just so that you've time to make sure you killed the weeds and grass effectively and don't have any areas needing re-spraying. This time of the year, the weeds and grass will die quickly.

Get the tiller running, and till the area thoroughly. Add the normal 2" layer of compost and 2" layer of expanded shale, and blend into the broken soil.

## **Plant Away!**

It's PLANTING TIME! Here are a few of the most important times. Much of what you'll be planting in the fall garden will be from seed and those times are listed here. Transplants can be done either at this time, or up to two to three weeks after the listed dates.

- Early July - tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, watermelon, eggplant
- Early August - Corn, cucumbers, turnips, summer squash, mustard greens. Last call for early July plantings.
- Mid-August - Beans, winter squash.
- Early September - lettuce, beets, cabbage, carrots, kale, collard greens, onions from seed, if you have the patience.
- Late September/early October - last plantings of all cole crops, lettuces, beets, turnips, carrots, onions, chard, garlic, etc.

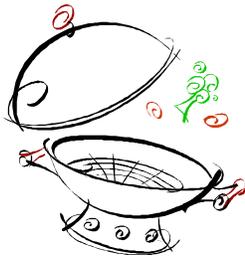
"But what if I WANT to plant something early? Or late? My mom always used to plant this plant on this day, why do you recommend differently? Was mom wrong? Or my Farmer's Almanac?" These times aren't set in stone, and the perfect planting date certainly can vary by the year's weather, care, and the year's insect or disease pressures. They are, however, excellent AVERAGE planting dates planting for production in North Texas. If you want to experiment, knock yourself out!

## Harvest Time

Generally make sure to harvest your garden crops as soon as they are ready. Regular harvesting can speed production of more edible harvests on peppers, okra, squash, tomatoes, and similar plants that continuously produce. Take tomatoes and peppers as soon as they begin to "pink" or reach a mature size to encourage faster regrowth.

Crops you fully harvest, such as lettuces, cabbages, greens, onions, turnips, beets, etc. should be allowed to make useful size before harvest. Many of these are edible from a young age, and tasty as such, but limit early harvesting to your needs to thin rows to increase your productive yield. (Unless you just have a passion for baby lettuces - lettuce seed is cheap and young lettuce is tender! Baby carrots too!)

We hope this guide helps you succeed in the fall garden! We leave you with this, a favorite (HIGHLY GENERALIZED) recipe of many of our nursery employees.



### The "I Garden" Stir-fry

- ✓ 1/2 pound of tasty protein - chicken, beef, you name it, cubed
- ✓ A great big double handful of fresh-harvested anything - ingredients can wildly vary!
- ✓ 1 tbsp. olive oil
- ✓ Spice to taste - fresh garlic, fresh ginger, soy sauce, fresh-cracked pepper and salt (use some, all, none, or other, your choice. Well, do use some salt anyway.)
- ✓ Most definitely fresh garden herbs - basil, oregano, sage, and/or rosemary
- ✓ Steamed rice or noodles if you wanted them

Heat the olive oil, sear the protein, rinse and chop tasty fresh-harvested anything. Toss in, stir-fry the contents, season and add herbs, washed and chopped. Simmer. Serve on bed of your favorite rice, noodles, or just ladle into a bowl by itself.