

Late-season vegetable gardens can feed our bodies, soothe our souls

by Trish Rudder

With many of us spending more hours at home these days, late summer is the time to put in a vegetable garden that will yield home-grown food right outside our doors.

According to motherearthliving.com, planting a second-season garden in July and August will yield crops all the way into early winter. And some plants grow best during the milder days and cooler nights of fall.

Beets, carrots, swiss chard, lettuce and parsnips will tolerate a light frost with temperatures of 28 to 32 degrees.

The first fall frost for 2020 in Berkeley Springs is October 10, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac.

If planting from seed, look for the average maturity period on the seed packets and count backward to figure the optimum planting time, adding a week or two for weather variations.

The following vegetable plants will thrive during the fall:

From seed directly sown into soil, **arugula** will mature in about 40 days. By staggering the plantings weekly, you will have a longer harvest period.

Beet seeds can be sown directly into the soil 10 to 12 weeks before the region's first frost. The tender leaves are edible and good in a salad.

Late-season **broccoli** plants will produce bigger and better tasting crowns than those grown in the heat of summer. If transplants are not available in the garden centers, put seeds in the ground to give plants 12 to 14 weeks to mature before the average first frost.

Brussels sprouts prefer cool weather and the plants can usually survive a hard frost. If growing from seed, buy a hybrid variety with a shorter growing season such as "Bubbles," "Oliver" and "Royal Marvel" that will be ready to harvest in about 12 weeks. The sprouts at the bottom of the plant will mature first and can be cut off the

stem when they are about the size of a walnut.

Carrots, too, are easy to cultivate and can tolerate a light frost. Try the fast-growing "Primo" which will mature in about 60 days, or a midget variety with three to four inch carrots called "Little Finger" that will be ready to harvest in about 68 days. Even if the temperature turns cold early, baby carrots can be harvested and enjoyed if they are not fully mature.

Collard greens can be sown from seed about eight to 12 weeks prior to the first average fall frost date. Pick the outer leaves when they are about six inches long and allow the inner leaves to continue growing to extend the harvest.

By covering the greens with milk-jug cloches, these cold-hardy plants will last even under snowfall.

Green onions can be planted eight weeks before the average first frost. The onion sets need to be planted an inch deep in well-drained soil. The harvested scallions with slender bulbs and long edible leaf stalks are similar to the common variety found in grocery stores.

Kale plant varieties such as "Red Russian" and "Winterbor" will be mature in about nine weeks and taste even sweeter after a frost or two. The baby leaves can be picked as early as 30 days for smoothies and salads.

Kohlrabi is a fast-growing member of the cabbage family that grows best in cooler weather. The round bulbs can be harvested from directly sown seeds in about 50 to 65 days. The leaves are edible and can be added to salads or cooked like spinach.

Loose-leaf lettuces are some of the easiest and fastest crops to direct-sow and grow. The butterhead and crisp-head varieties are cold hardy. Most varieties will be ready to pick in about 45 to 60 days and the baby leaves can



Late-season lettuce is ready to eat. Seeds were planted eight weeks before the fall frost.

be picked in about 30 days. For continuous fresh greens, do successive plantings a week or two apart.

With early frosts and chilly temperatures, the flavor of **parsnips** becomes sweeter and nuttier. Parsnip seeds are slow to germinate, so they should be planted in time to give them 100 to 120 days to mature. The "Kral Russian" heirloom variety matures in 75 to 86 days. In late fall, dig parsnips with a spading fork to unearth the roots.

Winter radishes grow quickly during the fall's cooler temperatures. The ruby-skinned "China Rose" will be ready to dig in about 52 days, while daikon matures in 60 to 70 days.

Snow peas grow best in cool temperatures and can handle early snow and a light frost. The "Short N' Sweet" and "Dwarf White Sugar" varieties will begin bearing in about 50 days. The soil needs to be moist for the peas to germinate, so check it and water

regularly, especially when late-season daytime temperatures are hot.

Spinach is another late-season crop that is easy to grow. Most varieties prefer about six weeks of cooler temperatures to thrive, so start seeds in mid-August and keep moist until plants are established for a fall harvest. Smooth-leaf "Olympia" is a prolific variety that grows well in late summer and autumn.

Swiss chard is easy to grow, especially the white-stemmed cultivated variety that are more productive and cold tolerant than colored varieties. "Fordhook Giant" is a fast-growing plant that can reach two feet high and matures in about 60 days. Chard can be steamed or cooked like spinach and the smaller leaves are good in salads.

Spend a little time during the height of summer heat to sow these seeds, and watch the fresh veggies season stretch well into the cooler fall.

Tips for Success

Loosen the soil in a three or four-foot wide by eight or 12-foot long plot. The website morningchores.com recommends making the garden plot only three feet wide and as long as you want.

Plant rows that run north and south to take advantage of the needed six to eight hours of sun.

Rows should be 18 inches apart to walk between.

Improve the soil by adding organic matter like shredded leaves or composted manure.

Good garden advice can be found at the burpee.com website.

Plant cool season crops like lettuces,

kale and root vegetables.

Even if you purchase small plants, sow seeds for radishes, lettuce and spinach.

Use high-quality seeds and water frequently.

See how to sow potatoes in a trench at the burpee.com site.

Plant frost-hardy vegetables like kale and parsnips that will taste better if exposed to a frost or two, said gardeningknowhow.com.

"Planting them in late summer will give you tasty vegetables long into autumn," wrote Liz Bessler of that site.

Plant cabbage, carrots, broccoli and cauliflower in July. They can be harvested in the fall.

Replant radishes, lettuce, kale, spinach, turnips and beets in August.

And leaf lettuce, spinach and turnips in September, gardeningchannel.com recommends. Some fall plants can even overwinter and start growing again in the spring.

Pthomeandgarden.com recommends the following vegetables to plant in late summer and "attain great results."

Carrots planted in late July or early August will give the seeds the best chance of producing fall carrots. The site recommends planting seeds every three weeks, approximately three to four inches apart.

Cauliflower seeds can be sown three to six inches apart in late August or early September (or six to eight weeks before the first frost).

Broccoli can be planted 85 days before the first fall frost. Plant seeds

12 to 24 inches apart in mid to late August.

Spinach seeds can be planted one inch apart in early August, and radish seeds can be planted one inch apart every two weeks while the weather is cool.

Onion sets can be planted four inches apart and are perfect for late season planting, according to Pthomeandgarden.com.

