

FALL CROP VEGETABLES

By Tiger Waddell, Frederick County Extension Master Gardeners

One of the delights of living in this part of the country is three full growing seasons for veggies. As the tomatoes and peppers start to fade, the air gets a bit cooler and the leafy greens and other spring crops will have a fighting chance for another round.

Immediate choices are lettuce, arugula, spinach, beets, carrots and radishes. Most sprout quickly; radishes only need three days to have leaves poking out, and they grow fast enough to produce before the frost hits in the fall. All these vegetables can be eaten raw, but radishes are quite delicious roasted, as well.

The brassica (broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage families) also do well in the fall and will have enough time to grow if planted in mid-August. They can handle a bit of cold weather. An extra bonus—there aren't any white flies to gobble holes in everything. All can be eaten raw or steamed. Cauliflower can also be roasted, which is beyond yummy.

If you didn't already get the Swiss chard started, this is your second chance. It will keep growing as the temperature drops; just harvest the lower leaves for continued production. Most recipes involve some sort of steam or sauté. Swiss chard makes a beautiful landing place for seared scallops; just sauté the chard in the scallop juices for a perfect blend of flavors.

Don't forget another round of sugar snap peas. They prefer cooler weather, so they are perfect for both spring and fall. Sandwich in a round of purple hull peas or lima beans in the summer, and plenty of nitrogen is trapped in that section of the soil to make an excellent spot for leafy greens next year. Sugar snaps never make it past raw in my house, so no cooking ideas here. I am lucky if any of them even make it home.

THE PROCESS

Use a trowel to turn over the soil. No need to till anything. If you have a raised bed or square-foot garden, you can do all of this sitting down. Clear existing plants and weeds, making sure to remove the roots. If you don't get the roots, you are pruning the weeds and making them stronger.

For leafy greens, lettuces and arugula, plant in rows or in a grid, as you prefer. Barely cover the seeds and pat them into place. Water lightly every day until they sprout, then every other day in the morning at the base. Keeping the leaves dry avoids many mold and fungus problems. Once they approach full size, water deeply every third day. Harvest the bottom leaves for a salad every day.

Beets, carrots and radishes need a bit more depth, so a grid is a good choice for maximum production in the least amount of area. Space the seeds twice as far apart as the resulting root plants will grow. Use a planting depth twice the size of the seed. Water in the morning every day until sprouts emerge. Then water every other day for two weeks, then every three days throughout the growing season.

For brassica, broccoli, cauliflower, or cabbage seeds, follow the spacing and depth recommended for each variety. Although these are more easily grown from seedlings, seedlings can be hard to find in the fall. You can plant the seeds in small peat pots or cardboard egg cartons to make them easier to protect until they get started. Again, water lightly every day until they sprout, then a bit deeper every other day until they get some size, then every third day throughout the rest of the growing season. The ground between the seeds or seedlings can be mulched with straw to discourage weeds and retain moisture. Or allow select weeds such as clover or portulaca to act as a ground cover. If you have any space left, consider growing some parsley. Some years it even survives through the winter.

Lettuce and arugula need to be harvested before the first frost. The rest can handle a few nippy nights and the carrots can be harvested as needed until January.

Arugula:



Arugula, sometimes known as “rocket” lettuce, especially in Europe, is a member of the Brassicaceae, or mustard family; thus, it gives a tangy, mustard-like flavor to whatever dishes you might prepare with it. (Picture courtesy of Almanac.com, vaivirga, Shutterstock)

Swiss chard:



Swiss chard, a member of the beet family, has many advantages in the garden, as it does well in both cool and warm weather and has many nutrients—vitamins, minerals, and fibers. (Picture courtesy of Almanac.com)

Sugar snap peas:



Sugar snap peas are a hardy annual and can withstand heavy frost, so you can plant them now to harvest in the fall. Harvest the edible pods when they are succulent and peas are small for sweet eating. (Picture courtesy of the University of Maryland Extension Service)

Hope you have great fun and many tasty meals from your fall garden!

The University of Maryland Extension Frederick County's Home Gardening/Master Gardeners Office is now open to the public. You can also find gardening information and advice online at:

- University of MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center>;
- Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>;
- Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>;
- or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>

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