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It's Time to Plant Fall Crops

Many gardeners do not think of late summer as planting season. Yet planting cool-season vegetables now can bring you fresh produce into October or even late November. Since the produce will ripen in cooler weather, they can even be tastier and healthier.

Although cool-season vegetables are more apt to withstand lower temperatures, they will need time to establish themselves before they can face fall weather. Planting seedlings when it is appropriate rather than seeds can give your crops a head start. When sowing seeds, plant them slightly deeper than you would in spring. With our current hot weather, this will provide extra insulation and moisture for successful germination. You can also help them with light fertilizing, as many nutrients from spring fertilizer applications are likely depleted by now. Do not be alarmed if the first frost causes some damage – this is normal and well-established crops should pull through.

In late July through early August, you can start planting cucumbers, summer squash, and beans. Beets, carrots, radishes, and other root vegetables can be sown directly into the soil. Once August hits, spinach and heat-tolerant leafy greens can go in the ground. If you have any cabbage, broccoli, or cauliflower starts, you can begin putting them into the ground in early to mid-August as well.

As you look ahead to the rest of your fall garden, now is the time to start seeds indoors for late August and early September plantings. Options include chicories, bulbing fennel, collards, kale, and leafy greens. Allowing these plants to start inside gives them a head start on growing when it is still too hot for them to be outside. Since the conditions inside your home or greenhouse are very different from those outside, be sure to slowly introduce them to the outdoors, increasing the amount and intensity of sunlight and the exposure to outdoor temperatures. This will prevent the plants from experiencing shock when they are planted in the ground.

Taking care of your fall garden is not difficult. You might even find that fall gardening is easier, as the lower temperatures mean you won't have to battle as many pests and weeds. When sowing seeds for fall, remember to keep the soil moist to allow germination. A soaker hose or drip irrigation is often the best option. Adding mulch can also help insulate the seedlings from hot August temperatures and retain moisture in the soil. If you are experiencing extended, intense heat, consider putting up a shade cloth a few feet over the soil to help provide protection from the heat during seed germination.