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Coaxing Fresh Vegetables From the Garden All Winter Long

By Kenneth Point

Autumn typically signals the end of home grown vegetables from the garden, but with a little

ingenuity you can harvest garden fresh produce well into the winter months. My Central Pennsylvania garden continues to supply fresh vegetables during the fall and winter when most gardeners in my growing region are content to dream about next summer's bounty. Read on to discover simple tricks that will fortify your garden against the onslaught of frigid weather.

Fall often delivers brief cold spells with a few frost filled mornings, sandwiched between weeks of milder, frost-free conditions. The problem is that a single touch of frost can wipe out every tender annual growing in the garden. Fortunately, a little protection will enable frost sensitive vegetables and herbs to survive a cold snap, and reward the resourceful gardener with an opportunity to enjoy extended harvests.

Something as simple as the transparent, fleecy, floating row covers used to shield plants from harmful insects can also prevent frost damage. Row covers trap the warmth that radiates up from the earth much like the way that a cloud cover holds temperatures and prevents frost from forming. Row covers offer a few degrees of protection, keeping tender annuals safe from light frost. Use the thicker grade covers for maximum benefit.

Late summer is the ideal time to sow cold tolerant vegetables that will flourish in the fall and endure cold weather without complaint. Examples of hardy vegetables for fall gardening include: kale, spinach, collards, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels Sprouts, kohlrabi, turnips, cabbages, oriental greens, rutabagas, and some varieties of lettuce.

Once freezing conditions arrive, even cold hardy crops will appreciate some protection if they remain in the garden. Cardboard boxes and fruit baskets can provide shelter to individual plants, while old sheets, blankets, and heavy plastic tarps will protect entire rows or beds of plants. Apply the coverings in the evening when freezes are forecast and remove them the following morning after the sun warms the air.

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Another effective solution is to use a commercial variety of cloche, or to set up a portable cold frame over the garden bed. Cloches include the heavy glass, bell shaped jars, or variously styled and shaped rigid plastic devices.

One style of cold frame consists of a tubular frame covered by a woven poly material with flaps for venting. You can also obtain sturdier cold frames made with aluminum framing and twin wall polycarbonate panels that lift up for venting. Regardless of the type of protection used to cover your plants you must remove it or provide venting during the day as temperatures rise.

Resourceful gardeners can combine a few discarded window sashes and bales of straw to create a simple makeshift cold frame. Just arrange the straw bales into a rectangular shape around a garden bed and lay the windows across the top to form an enclosed and insulated growing area. This setup will work great to keep a bed of leafy greens growing further into the winter.

Oddly enough, water can protect and insulate plants from the cold. Commercial orchards actually spray

water and mist onto their trees to prevent frost damage. In the home garden you can employ plastic gallon jugs filled with water to provide protection. Place the containers around plants, under floating row covers or tarps, and inside of your cold frames.

The water will absorb and store heat during the day and release it at night to provide warmth for your plants. You'll get the best results by painting the jugs black so that they'll absorb more energy from the sun during the day. Incredibly, even if the water in the container freezes, it will continue to release a significant amount of heat energy into the surrounding area.

Certain vegetables will survive on their own in the garden through bitterly cold conditions. Leeks, kale, and collards frequently withstand harsh winters without any protection. Fall planted garlic and shallots will develop strong root systems in the fall, spend the winter underground, and then spring up at the earliest signs of the arrival of spring.

Many root crops including beets, carrots, turnips, rutabagas, and parsnips can be left in the garden protected with a thick layer of shredded leaves or straw. You can then continue harvesting as needed, provided that the ground doesn't freeze and prevent digging. Complete your harvesting before spring arrives though, since quality will degrade once the roots resume growing and switch into seed production mode.

With proper planning and a little extra care you can easily grow and harvest vegetables beyond the normal spring and summer seasons. Simply implement a few of the ideas presented in this article and you'll soon enjoy your own home grown, fresh produce much longer than usual, possibly even year-round.

Kenneth Point publishes a monthly gardening newsletter and is the author of the "Amazing Secrets to Growing Luscious Fruits and Vegetables at Home." For free gardening tips and information visit his website at

<http://www.gardeningsecrets.blogspot.com>

Grow Your Own Produce For Fresh Cooking

By Lee Dobbins

There's nothing like cooking with fresh produce and what better way to have them readily available than to grow your own kitchen garden! A kitchen garden not only gives you good fresh produce but it also adds a bit of interest to your yard. It can be as simple as just a few herbs or you can go all out and grow vegetables too.

Fruit, vegetables and herbs are very rewarding to grow and there's an extra special flavor to produce you've grown yourself. Plus you know that no pesticides or chemicals have been used when you grow it yourself.

While cooking with fresh foods you've grown yourself might sound great, be warned, a kitchen garden is going to be very labor-intensive. If you don't like gardening or working outside, you might be better off getting your produce at the grocery store. The only way you're going to get a good healthy crop of fruit, vegetables and herbs is by lavishing tender loving care and attention on them.

If you do decide that a kitchen garden is for you, start growing early and you may produce a bountiful crop weeks ahead of the normal time. This will give you a good harvest during a time when those fruits and vegetables are particularly expensive in the store.

You can make your kitchen garden as functional and attractive as possible with careful planning. If space is at a premium you can choose some of the more decorative vegetables and herbs and plant them in your flower beds.

Make sure you pick a sunny site in your garden as most herbs and vegetables need the sun to do well. If you are growing fruit trees, you should ensure that they do not cast a shadow over the vegetables and herbs.

When planting your herbs, remember that they will stay green almost all year so make sure you plan for how they will contrast with the existing plants. Tall herbs can be planted at the back of a traditional flower garden and low-growing herbs make excellent flower garden borders.

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If you don't have a lot of garden space, you can plant herbs in containers and they will do well. You can also plant many vegetables in containers. Peas, potatoes and tomatoes are just a few that will do well.

Some vegetables are even attractive enough to be planted amongst the flowers – but remember that you are going to have gaps once the vegetables are harvested.

Many people think you need acres of land to have fruit trees, but there is a large range of fruit that you can grow even if you have a small yard. Small apple trees can even grow in pots on the patio and strawberries do well in containers. There's even varieties of cordon-trained apples and pears that can be grown against a garden fence.

If you want to enjoy the flavor of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs in your gourmet cooking, there really is no reason at all why you can't have the joy of growing and harvesting food for your own kitchen table in your own kitchen garden, no matter how small the plot.

Lee Dobbins writes for

Online Gourmet Foods

where you can learn more about gourmet eating.



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