Now is the time to plant a fall garden

Source: Rick Durham, extension professor, UK Department of Horticulture

The end of summer doesn’t have to mean the end of the growing season. Now is the time to plant a fall vegetable garden and fill your pantry with cool-season crops well into late autumn. Some of the best quality vegetables are produced during fall’s warm days and cool nights. These environmental conditions add sugar to late-season sweet corn and cole crops, such as cauliflower and cabbage and crispness to carrots.

Fall vegetables are harvested after early September. They consist of two types: the last succession plantings of warm‑season crops, such as corn and bush beans and cool‑season crops that grow well during the cool fall days and withstand frost.

When planting a fall garden, group crops in the same way you would in the spring; plant so taller plants don’t shade out shorter ones. To encourage good germination, fill each seed furrow with water and let it soak in. Keep the soil moist until seeds have germinated. Cool nights slow growth, so plants take longer to mature in the fall than in the summer.

Polyethylene row covers are a useful way to extend the growing season of frost‑sensitive crops, such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. The objective of using a row cover is to trap heat from the soil and protect the crop from cold night temperatures. Often in Kentucky, a period of mild weather will follow the first killing frost. If you protect frost‑sensitive vegetables at critical times in the fall you could extend the harvest season by several weeks. Once these vegetables die due to lower temperatures, you may be able to plant cool-season crops in their place. Leafy greens such as lettuce and spinach may grow into November or December under polyethylene row covers if outside temperatures do not drop below the teens. Be sure to allow for ventilation on sunny days to prevent overheating.

The following vegetables can be successfully seeded or transplanted now for fall harvest: beets, Bibb lettuce, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collards, endive, leaf lettuce, kale, mustard greens, spinach, snow peas and turnips.

For more information about planting a fall garden, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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