

Roth: Time to garden?

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Time to garden?

Now that the autumnal equinox has begun and the heat of summer is subsiding, it might surprise you to know this is an excellent time to plant a garden.

Gardening is truly a year-round activity and in Oklahoma some of the best vegetables are grown and harvested in the fall. As more and more Americans grow interested in the source, quality and integrity of their food, more and more Americans are growing their own. And the unique mixture of Oklahoma's warm autumn days followed by cool, humid nights creates great climate conditions for high-quality vegetables.

Oklahomans can confidently sow carrots, beans, cucumbers, summer squash, beets, Irish potatoes, lettuce, mustard, radishes, rutabagas, spinach, Swiss chard and turnips, according to the Master Gardener programs at the Oklahoma State University Extension Services across our state. To learn more specifics, please check out www.tulsamastergardeners.org.

Timing

You will want to contemplate a few things on the timing of your plantings for different types of vegetables. Your planting should be timed to allow frost-sensitive plants (like beans, squash and cucumbers) to mature before Oklahoma's frost begins, which as we Oklahomans know is often hard to predict. And for those vegetables that have more tolerance for frost, (like beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collards, Irish potatoes, leaf lettuce, radishes, rutabaga, Swiss chard and turnips) they can be grown and harvested even during times of mild fall frosts later in the season. And if you are late to plant this fall, your best bet is probably mustard and spinach.

You may also opt for transplanting starter plants for your fall garden, rather than using seeds, as germinating seeds will obviously take longer to grow and produce and also pose more risk regarding water levels as their small root systems require daily attention.

Desirable soil conditions for fall

If you've just come off a spring or summer garden it is recommended that you clean up existing plants and mulch the soil to pre-cool it. After about a week, remove the mulch and analyze the soil to determine what if anything else may help to prepare it. Modifying or improving the soil with fertilizers, adding organic materials and improving aeration and drainage go a long way to creating the desirable soil for your garden. Additional fertilizers may be beneficial to

stimulate growth and production. These might be incorporated in the soil prior to planting your garden or applied on the soil surface later.

And since fall seeds are planted shallower than warmer-weather gardens, sufficient water is critical to their growth and production.

Soils that produced a spring or summer vegetable crop will be more easily managed and readied than those made from scratch from established grasses and yards. If you are starting a fall garden from scratch, please do consult the OSU Extension advice and suggestions for soil preparation, soil quality and planting methods to obtain a garden of plenty for your upcoming holidays and family meals.

Bringing a homegrown food dish to share with family and friends is a very thoughtful way to share the bounty. And because fall vegetables are often more dense and productive than those that survive our summer season, you may end up with extra vegetables to can and preserve for those cold winter months that will be here sooner than we might like to admit.

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