



COOL WEATHER VEGETABLE GARDENING

STARNOTE 200
June 2009

When and what for fall and winter

Vegetables have been grown successfully in desert climates for many years. One of the great surprises to many new gardeners is the variety and quality of produce that can be grown during cooler weather. Soil preparation is very important in producing crops here. For the home gardener a few basic rules apply:

- Don't try to garden in caliche or hard-pack clay! If you have an impermeable layer near the surface, build raised beds and fill them with a mixture of native soil and bagged organic material like *Dr. Q's Paydirt™ Planting Mix*, or if you plan a larger garden try our pre-mixed landscape soil.
- Use the right fertilizers for what you're trying to grow. Leaf crops need lots of nitrogen; root and fruit crops like carrots and peas need less nitrogen and more phosphorus and potassium. A Star Nursery sales associate can help you pick the right fertilizer. A good choice is *Dr. Q's® Vegetable Food*.
- When amending vegetable beds, a mix of no more than one half organic material to native soil will suffice. To keep soil fresh and viable, add more organic material each time you plant a new crop. Add *Dr. Q's® Gold Dust Starter Fertilizer*, according to package directions, a day or so before planting.
- Surface mulches help prevent weeds, conserve water and protect plant roots. Cedar Mulch will repel insects without the use of pesticides. Use them generously.
- Pests can often be controlled by hand and sprays of water from the hose. The biggest pest in winter vegetable gardens, besides aphids, is usually the cabbage looper, which can be safely controlled with *Bio-Worm Killer®* or equivalent bacillus thuringensis (BT) product. ALWAYS FOLLOW LABEL DIRECTIONS.
- If your vegetable bed will be used again in the spring and summer, you may want to plan for some afternoon shade.

Most cool-season vegetables are adapted to frost, but, be flexible and prepare to protect your young plants from cold and wind if necessary.

If you want to start your own seedlings instead of using transplants, add a 6 to 10 week lead time, depending on variety. For example, if you want early broccoli, you should start it indoors in mid-August to have it ready for an October planting.. An early spring crop would be planted mid December to have it ready for a February planting.

For warm season vegetables, those you would plant in the spring, get a copy of StarNote 205, *Warm Weather Vegetable Gardening*. If you're just getting started, the best advice is to start small and build on your successes.

Varieties

Following is a list of popular cool-season vegetables often grown in our climate. These varieties are generally heat-sensitive and prefer the cool days of fall, winter and early spring to produce their best crops. Some of the planting dates can be stretched by using hybrid varieties. All dates are approximate, and depend on the weather. Warm season vegetables, such as tomatoes and peppers, can be started from seeds indoors in January, and be transplanted to the garden when the weather is right. Transplants can be found at Star Nursery locations starting in late February.

Beets (*Dec through Jan-- seed*): Prefers sandy soil. Plant regularly for long harvest season. Harvest young; older beets tend to be woody.

Broccoli (*Sep—seed; Oct thru Feb--transplants*): Easy to grow; side shoots continue to produce long after main head is harvested. Recovers well from extremely cold weather.

Brussels Sprouts (*Sep-seed; Oct-transplants*): Larger plant prefers good drainage. Pick cabbage-like heads when smaller than a golf ball. A single plant may yield 50-100 sprouts.

Cabbage & Kale-Edible (*Sep to Nov—seed and transplants*):

Ornamental (*Aug to Sep—seed; Oct to Jan—transplants*):

Many edible and ornamental varieties. Rotate location each year to avoid pest build-up.

Carrots (*Sep.; Feb to May—seed*): Choose short varieties unless you have excellent soil a foot or more deep, otherwise carrots will be distorted and stunted. Plant often for fresh crops and harvest when young for best flavor.

Cauliflower (*Late July-seed; Feb, Oct-transplants*): Similar to broccoli. Use large leaves at base to cover over developing head to keep it white, or it will mature purple or green (but still tasty).

Collards & Mustard (*All year—seed/ transplants*): Different plants with similar appearance, taste and culture. Choose "hot weather" varieties if available.

Lettuce (*All year--seed/transplants*): Leaf lettuce, like Black Seeded Simpson and Romaine, can be grown all year. Head lettuce can only be grown in the cooler parts of the year, and is more difficult. Plant every two weeks for a good, regular crop. Favorite food of loopers, snails and neighborhood cats.

Onions, Dry (*Oct to Mar--seed or sets*): Thin early; harvest next year after the tops wither.

Onions, Green (*Sep to June--seed or sets*): Easy from sets; plant regularly for continual crop of young, sweet onions.

Peas (*Nov; Feb—seed*): Bush varieties are much easier to deal with. Try snap and sugar hybrids and choose heat resistant varieties if available. Prefer rich soil with excellent drainage.

Radish (*All Year—seed*): Gets pithy and hot fast, especially in poor soil. Plant small quantities every two weeks for regular supply. Give rich soil for sweetest, mildest radishes.

Spinach (*Sep to Oct; Feb—seed*): Thin plants to 6 inches apart. Feed once during season. Cut off at ground level to harvest, avoiding the extra grit that comes from pulling up the whole plant.

Tomato (*Aug to Sep—transplants*): Made possible by long desert growing season. Plant fast developing varieties like Early Girl for late fall crop. May need to harvest green in late October or early November to prevent frost damage. Wrap in paper and store at room temperature. Will keep through most of winter. Place in kitchen window when you want them—they'll ripen in a few days.

Turnips & Rutabagas (*Aug to Oct; Feb—seed*): Grow turnips for relatively quick crop; rutabagas if you want to store them. Both have tasty greens which can be sparingly harvested without hurting the developing bulb.