

It's the Season – Autumn Gardening

Article by Virginia Davis, Rockwall County Extension Master Gardener

Photo by Lisa Johnson, Rockwall County Extension Master Gardener

Have you wanted to try vegetable gardening? If so, you might be thinking, “It’s August... it’s too late AND too hot for a garden this year.” Think again. Did you know that North Texas has two growing seasons; spring and autumn? Autumn in North Texas is an ideal time to try your hand, or at least your green thumb, at gardening. Late July and August are the perfect times to get things ready for the upcoming growing season.

A few key factors to consider, as you are readying your autumn garden, include:

- Proper site selection
- Space: in-ground or container
- Soil preparation
- Plants for the garden

Site selection is an important decision for gardeners regardless the season. Both the amount of space and amount of time available to tend the garden should be evaluated when choosing the garden’s size and site. Three additional factors should be examined with site selection: will the garden receive at least eight hours of direct sunlight/day, is the soil well-draining, and is water readily accessible.

Soil preparation for in-ground gardens includes removing any vegetation from the spring growing season or, with new garden sites, removing any grass and weeds. Turning the garden area’s soil to a depth of 10 to 12 inches is also recommended. Obtaining a soil test of your garden area, if one has not been obtained in the last 2 years, will provide useful data for making your decision about adding ammonium sulfate, slow-release fertilizer or composted horse/cow manure. After mixing the chosen fertilizer into the soil, the next step is to thoroughly water the entire garden. Garden soil with proper moisture content, as evidenced by the soil crumbling when pushed through your fingers, is ready for planting.

Both novice and experienced gardeners find that growing vegetables in containers has noteworthy benefits. Container gardening is a minimal space approach avoiding diseases and pests found in the ground, eliminating drainage problems with proper containers, and reducing the days from planting to production due to container’s elevated root zone. Container garden yields/plant can equal those of in-ground gardens. Other benefits of container gardening include comfortable height for tending the plants, ability to move the container, depending on its size, to take advantage of the changing seasonal sunlight exposure and/or reduce the impact of an early frost.

Soil preparation for container gardens is usually much easier than for in-ground gardens. Start with fresh growing media, either soilless or with soil. Soilless mixtures can be made or purchased. These

are free of disease and weed seeds, hold moisture and nutrients, drain well and are lightweight. Soil mixes are made up of sphagnum peat moss or compost, composted cow manure, pasteurized soil and perlite or vermiculite.

Considerations when deciding what to plant in your autumn garden include: average first frost date (for Rockwall County November 15-17), length of time from planting to harvest, planting from seeds or transplants, and tolerance of frost. Plants susceptible to frost will be killed or damaged with temperature of 32 F. Susceptible plants can be protected from frost by moving them to an enclosed, protected area or by covering with frost cloth. The table below provides information that will help in planting decisions.

Selected Options for North Texas Autumn Vegetable Gardens				
Plant	Planting Method: Seed OR Transplant	Plant Date	Days plant to harvest	Frost Tolerance: Susceptible OR Tolerant
Summer squash	Seed	Aug 1 - Aug 30	50-60	Susceptible
Radish	Seed	Sept 20 - Nov 15	25-40	Tolerant
Spinach (crinkled)	Seed	Sept 15 - Nov 1	40-60	Tolerant
Pepper	Transplant	July 3 - Aug 25	60-90	Susceptible
Cherry tomato	Transplant	June 20 - July 15	55-90	Susceptible
Carrots	Seed	Sept 1 - Sept 30	70-80	Tolerant
Lettuce	Seed	Sept 1 - Sept 30	40-80	Tolerant
Cabbage	Seed	Aug 15 - Sept 20	60-90	Tolerant

More options for your autumn vegetable garden can be found in the Texas A&M MG Vegetable Planting Guide. Getting started now can provide an autumn garden full of delicious vegetables to enjoy into winter.

https://txmg.org/rockwall/files/MG-Vegetable-Planting-Guide_2024.pdf

<https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/browse/featured-solutions/gardening-landscaping/fall-vegetable-gardening-guide-for-texas/>

Here We Grow
Timely Tips from Rockwall County Master Gardeners

<https://cdn-de.agrilife.org/extension/departments/hort/hort-pu-090/publications/files/Vegetable-gardening-in-containers.pdf>

<https://ccmgatx.org/media/1318/vegetables-for-the-fall-garden-growing-tips.pdf>

<https://cdn-de.agrilife.org/extension/departments/hort/hort-pu-104/publications/files/easy-gardening-fertilizing-1.pdf>

