

FALL IS FOR VEGETABLE GARDENING

After the spring and summer we've had, though it was more of a non-stop summer, the idea of fall vegetable gardening may seem like complete insanity. It did to me every single 100 plus degree day in August. I seriously considered not planting a fall garden this year, much to the chagrin of my daughter and grandchildren. The thought of having the plants sprout up and then get flash fried was more than I wanted to deal with and then there was the idea of trying to keep them watered.

As I sit here writing this article, the windows are all open, I have on a long sleeve shirt and I'm going out later to plant green beans.

In the years that I have had vegetable garden, my fall garden has always produced better than the spring garden. Looking back over the maps and notes from those gardens, I usually plant the last week of August through about the 15th of September.

Our average first frost date is November 10th. Keep in mind, that is an average and nothing has fit our normal patterns the last couple of years. Keep your eye on the weather as we get later into the year. If a frost is in forecast, you can cover your plants with frost blankets, old towels, buckets or plastic milk jugs. Take the covering off as soon as the sun is out and temps come up or you will cook your plants. Collard greens are an exception to that rule. They take frost, keep going, and actually taste better.

There were six tomato plants in my garden this year. I cut them all back by a third in mid July. Three have survived, the Brandywine looks the best of the bunch, the cherry tomato looks good and the yellow pear is questionable. The Cayenne Pepper made it through, looks beautiful and we'll have a bumper crop out that, making one son-in-law very happy. I was ready to pull the pumpkin vines out last week since they weren't setting fruit, when I found one about soccer ball size. I'll leave them in and see if I can get any more before the first frost.

If you'll go to our web site, overthegardengate.org, click on "Gardening Information for Our Area", there is a list of vegetable varieties recommended for North Central Texas, with spring and fall planting dates. It's a great resource to help you get the most out of your garden.

Check with the local nurseries and locations that sell spring vegetable plants to see if they have brought in plants for fall. Let's not be quitters. There are always challenges when you garden, and this year Mother Nature decided to throw everything in her arsenal at us. It's made us tougher gardeners, showed us what can take the heat, and really made us appreciate air conditioning.

PLEASE remember, the wildfire danger is still very, very high. The lower temperatures are great, but we are by no means out of harm's way. Be extremely careful when you are working outside, especially if you are doing anything that could possibly spark a fire. All it takes is ONE spark. Like Smokey Bear says, "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires".