

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Ursula Nanna
FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING

Consider planting a fall vegetable garden right now. It is an excellent time in Central Texas. There may be some clean up from the spring veggies, some light tilling and raking out, but nothing massive. Prune tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant so they leaf out and flower again to bear more fruit.

The easiest way to start veggies is direct seeding. Remember to till 3-4 " of compost into the soil, breaking up the hard ground, and then aerating the soil to help the seeds germinate. Plant the seeds, loosely covering them with soil. Water the bed lightly. Keep the soil moist, not wet, until the seeds germinate, then water as needed. Once the seedlings are 2-3 inches tall, apply some mulch to keep the soil cool and moist.

Since most garden centers do not carry seedlings this time of year, we can start our own vegetable plants in 4" pots. Mix well 50% good garden soil, 25% perlite and 25% vermiculite and add to 6 packs. Make a small depression in the soil mix and add one seed per chamber and then cover the seed with 1/2" of the soil mix. Wet the soil keeping it moist until the seedlings have developed their second true leaves and transplant the seedlings to the garden bed. Zucchini, acorn squash, butternut squash, and yellow squash are easy to grow, but broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower are more challenging.

Purchase early maturing seeds for fall veggies and count back from the first frost date the number of days to maturity plus the days for germination plus 14 days for harvesting. For example, if kale matures in 65 days and takes 14 days to germinate plus 14 days for harvesting: $65 + 14 + 14 = 93$ days. If the first frost is, say, December 1, count back 93 days and plant the seeds around August 27th.

Kale, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, turnips, broccoli, and rutabagas are cold hardy to about 25 degrees F. Beets, green onions, mustard, leaf lettuce, radishes, potatoes, Swiss chard, and Bibb lettuce are semi-cold hardy and need to be covered with row cloth or buckets if 35 degrees F or colder is anticipated. Root crops, like beets, rutabagas, carrots, turnips, and parsnips can be left in the ground and heavily mulched during the winter. A fall vegetable garden brings great rewards and good eats! Try one this year. Have any questions? Try ask.bcmga@gmail.com

