

Vegetable Gardening in June, July and August

The dog days of summer are upon us. What does this phrase even mean? Well, this article was written in March, a period in my life when gardening and home schooling were happening simultaneously. Thanks, COVID-19! It just so happened that I needed to write this article for work, and I needed to help my fifth grader son learn about astronomy. We were reviewing the constellations, their major stars and why astrology — not astronomy — is thought of as a pseudoscience. The dog days of summer to us in the 21st century means serious heat. However, to the ancient Greeks it meant the period when the “Dog Star,” or Sirius, was visible in the night sky ... and that used to happen in July. Depending on where you live in the northern hemisphere, you may or may not see Sirius in July anymore because of your latitude and the Earth’s wobbly spinning motion. However, what we do know is June, July and August are hot months and, like astrology and astronomy, good and bad garden advice will circulate. Therefore, if you are looking for sound horticulture science, not pseudoscience, look no further than the few paragraphs below.



Cantaloupe



Tomatoes



Broccoli

June

Collard greens, cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupe, okra, southern peas, pumpkins and summer squash can all be seeded directly into the garden during June. Wait until late June to plant pumpkins if you want them ready for early October and Halloween decorating.

You can plant sweet potato slips this month.

In mid-June, plant a summer crop of heat-set tomatoes. Planting heat-set tomatoes is very important. These cultivars have been bred to set fruit during high nighttime temperatures, whereas other cultivars will not. If managed correctly, heat-set tomatoes will produce fruit through October. Preferred varieties include Florida 91, Solar set, Sun Master, Phoenix and Bella Rosa.

July

Transplant another fall crop of heat-set tomatoes (late July). These will take you through the first freeze. Transplant bell peppers as well.

Direct-seed okra, southern peas, cucumbers, squash, cantaloupe and watermelons throughout July. Direct-seed pumpkins in the first week of July for an early October harvest.

Late July or early August is a good time to start thinking about your fall garden. Order broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage and all your root crop seeds. This is very important because all the good gardeners are also ordering seeds now, and you don’t want the leftovers!

August

Plant bush lima beans in the garden.

Start seeds of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, cucumbers, squash, mustard greens and shallot sets for an early fall garden start in September. Start your seeds on a table outdoors under the shade. Do not forget to keep them moist.

You can transplant broccoli and Brussels sprouts as early as mid-August in the garden but beware of worms. They will get you this time of year. I personally like to wait until mid-September to transplant fall crops. But some people like the thrill of being the first on the block with the fall produce. In a garden rush? At the end of this month, direct-seed beets and lettuce for an early crop.

Late August is the perfect time for a fall crop of Irish potatoes. It is hard to find them at the hardware store, so many people save the smaller potatoes from their spring harvest for a fall planting. If you are doing this, you do not need to cut the potatoes into pieces. Just plant the small potatoes whole.

Are your okra and eggplants looking a little spindly? Cut them back about knee height and add a little fertilizer. They will flush out again and produce until the first freeze.

Enjoy the garden!

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