

Fall and Winter Gardens

By Valerie Jean Rose
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Plant now for harvest in autumn and winter seasons

Imagine yourself at home on a dimly lit January day. Friends and family chat, while simmering soup perfumes the slightly chilled air. On the table, a bowl of confetti-colored salad glows like a floral centerpiece, brimming with shredded carrots, chard, radicchio, radishes, spinach, and baby kale. As everyone eats, they praise the rich flavors of warm soup and crisp salad, and someone asks, “Where did you buy these vegetables? They don’t taste jet-lagged, they have real flavor.”

You reply, “I just got them out of the garden!” When the guests ask if you planted them last fall, you answer, “No, you’ve got to start a winter garden in the summer.”

Our maritime northwest climate moderates winter cold and summer heat so much that we can grow delicious food year-round. I don’t mean tomatoes in January or strawberries in November—that kind of out-of-season food looks pretty, tastes empty and carries a huge carbon footprint. But well into fall, and even winter, you can grow and eat an array of tasty vegetables. Your harvest can include leafy greens, cabbage, broccoli and Brussels sprouts, along with carrots, beets and other root vegetables. A light frost even brings out the best flavor in collard greens and parsnips! Now is the time to plan and plant, starting with the best location for maximizing scarce sunlight.



Look for the sunny side

Make a sun and shade map of your yard or patio. (Yes, your container garden can also grow cool-season vegetables if it gets enough sun.) Locate your fall/winter garden where the low lying winter sun will still find its way into your yard as it arcs low across the southern sky. Note which buildings will cast longer shadows as the days get shorter. Deciduous trees will conveniently drop their leaves, blocking much less light, while a fence or building on the south edge of the yard may be in deep shade for months.

Raised beds will keep your garden from drowning in winter rains. A bed made of boards or cement blocks also provides an easy place to secure hoops for supporting row covers. Bend flexible plastic pipes between the short sides

of your raised bed, and cover with plastic or plant protection fabric. If you use plastic, remember to pull it back for occasional watering. For gardeners who also enjoy small construction projects, re-purpose lumber and old windows into a well-sited cold frame. In the spring, start your cool-season crops earlier, or harden-off plant starts before setting them out into the open ground.

You can get fancy and bury heat coils in the dirt, but our moderate climate allows gardeners to grow an abundance of food without an additional heat source. Writer and educator Eliot Coleman farms year-round in coastal Maine, harvesting fresh produce from snow-covered, unheated greenhouses. His classic guide, *The Winter Harvest Handbook*, coaches novice and experienced gardeners in extending the growing season. *Winter Gardening in Maritime Northwest: Cool Season Crops for the Year-Round Gardener*, by Binda Colebrook is especially suited for our region. The right seed catalog can also guide you to a vegetable bounty well beyond summer.



Left: Cold frames can be personally sized for the small home garden or built to last for many seasons and large enough to shelter hundreds of tender seedlings. The cold form lid should be hinged to allow it to be easily lifted for ventilation. **Center:** Garden or row cover fabric is woven to allow water, air and light to reach the plants inside, while retaining heat and offering some insect protection. The cover can be removed during the hot summer months or replaced with a lighter weight fabric. **Right:** The Garden cloche, or bell jar, was developed in France centuries ago to provide a minigreenhouse environment for tender seedlings. The cloche channels rain away from the neck of the plant and toward the root growth area, and the increased temperature will promote more vigorous growth and potentially reduce “damping off.” *Photos by Chris Farrow / WSU Skagit Master Gardeners.*

Variety is key

Planting a fall/winter garden requires seeds and plants proven to grow well in summer heat, then ripen as the daylight shortens and the temperature drops. Avoid grabbing any old half-used seed packet from the shoebox (or wherever you keep them—I use a lidded plastic bucket). Read the label. If this cabbage is best planted in early spring, save it for next year. Look for seed catalogs that focus specifically on fall/winter gardening in west coast or northern climates. They feature helpful charts with planting dates. They also include a reminder that gardeners must plant earlier if they’re growing in a colder zone than the seed company’s locations. You may decide to leave this step to a commercial grower and buy plant starts from nursery and garden stores. Read the label carefully to ensure you’re getting a late-season variety.

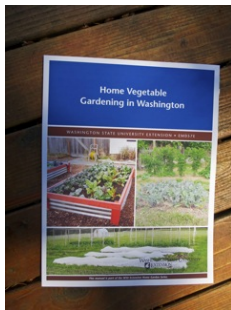
Take time at the height of summer to plant a fall/winter garden. The fresh, delicious harvest will brighten your autumn and winter meals.

Know and Grow Workshop Learn How to Plant Now

- What:** 'Planning and Planting Your Fall/Winter Garden' with Valerie Rose
Skagit County Master Gardener Valerie Rose will guide you through the steps
For planting a garden now for harvest in late fall and even in winter in this
Washington State University *Know and Grow Workshop*.
- When:** Monday, July 15, 6 – 7:30 PM
- Where:** Mount Vernon City Library
315 Snoqualmie Street, Mount Vernon
- Cost:** Free and open to the public
- Info:** For more information, contact the library at 360-336-6209.

RESOURCES:

- Planting for Fall, Winter and Spring, WSU Clark County Extension,
http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/FallVeggies.html
- Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening in the Pacific NW, by Pat Patterson, Lane County
Extension, Oregon State University,
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/pnw/pnw548>



New Publication:

“Home Vegetable Gardening in Washington” is a new publication containing planting and planning charts for the home gardener. It can be downloaded for free from cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/EM057E/EM057E.pdf