

Plant Edibles in September

Would you like to harvest salad-makings from your garden during the winter? Try endive, a member of the Compositae family, much hardier than many lettuces. It may overwinter in temperatures as low as 10 degrees Fahrenheit. September-sown endive will fare better under cover than out in the open, since rain and damp-induced mildews can make the plants unusable. Endive varieties with broad, fleshy leaves slightly curled at the edges are known as escarole or broad-leaved Batavian endive. The varieties which have slender leaves with wavy edges are known simply as endive, or sometimes by their French name of chicoree frisee or just frisee. Many varieties are self blanching. For other varieties, tie the outer leaves together 2 to 3 weeks before harvesting. Check your seed source for approximate growing time. Do not buy seed of Belgian endive (witloof or white leaf) for fall planting, as that is an altogether different plant. Sow seeds 1/2 inch deep, 2–4 seeds per inch, in rows 12–16 inches apart, thinning gradually and carefully to 12 inches apart in the row. (Add the thinned baby plants to salads.) Moisture trapped between touching leaves causes rot, so thinning to separate the plants is important. In most garden soils, no fertilizer should be used. (Grown slowly, the endive will be hardier.) For the best growth, soil pH should be near 6.1–6.5. As most of the roots only penetrate the soil eight inches or so, care should be taken in cultivating. Try not to work the soil around the plants any deeper than an inch. A great addition to salads, endive loses its bitterness when gradually exposed to freezing temperatures.

Another interesting choice for September planting is the Asian mustard green, Mizuna. Mizuna is a member of the Brassicaceae family (cabbage) with a fairly high tolerance for frost and rainy conditions. Mizuna prefers well-drained, fertile soil high in organic matter, with a pH of 6.0–7.5. It can tolerate slightly alkaline soil. Seeds will germinate at soil temperatures as low as 45 degrees Fahrenheit. However, the best temperature for germination is between 65–80 degrees Fahrenheit. Some varieties mature in as little as 30 days, with optimum conditions. Most mustards act as "cut and come again" greens. (Clip the outer leaves, or the tops, leaving the plant about 2" tall and the plant will continue to produce.)

Other greens and herbs for early September sowing and winter harvesting include: arugula (rocket), chervil, cilantro (coriander leaf), cress, lettuce, mustard, onion sets (for greens), radish, and spinach. Protect your planting under floating row covers, tunnels, cloches, or coldframes. Cabbages to be harvested in the early spring may also be planted in early September.

Late in the month, plant some crops which are meant to overwinter with just four to eight true leaves and to provide February/March harvests. These should not require cover unless we get very cold weather. Choose from: arugula and rustic arugula, beets, caraway, carrot, chervil, fava beans, lettuce, mustard, radish, snow peas, spinach, sweet cicely, or overwintering grains.

For your September lettuce sowings, select varieties which have been bred to survive cold, wet, short days: the butterheads Arctic King, Brune d'Hiver, Nancy, North Pole, Optima, Rougette du Midi, Sangria, and Winter Marvel; and the romaine/cos types Little Gem, Rouge d'Hiver, and Winter Density.

Best results occur by choosing plants or seeds that are bred especially for fall and winter conditions. Check your favorite local nursery or check out the following sites on-line.

Some Sources

<http://www.territorial-seed.com/>

<http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com/>

<http://www.johnnyseeds.com/>

<http://www.wildgardenseed.com/>

Updated by Sally Greenlee, August 2007 from the Garden Mastery tips Archives – September, 2006 and September 2001. Updated with information from Territorial Seed Winter Catalog and [Vegetable Varieties for Gardeners](#).