Gardeners begin summer harvest…and look ahead to fall

Fall gardens do best when planted in mid-July, says K-State horticulture expert

MANHATTAN, Kan. – It’s nearing the middle of July, so Kansas gardeners are turning their thoughts to harvesting tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and many other fruits and vegetables.

It’s not the time to begin the work all over again…right?

“Probably the last thing most gardeners are thinking of right now is planting vegetables,” said Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham. “But fall gardens will often produce higher quality, tastier cool-season crops if you plant now.”

Upham said fall vegetables do well if they are allowed to mature during cooler, less stressful times. That means a fall bounty requires getting seeds into the ground as early as mid-July.

Planting vegetables during summer’s heat, however, requires a different approach. “Plant seeds slightly deeper than you would in the spring so that it stays cooler, and the soil around the seeds stay moist longer,” Upham said. “Plant more thick, and thin the plants later. The plants also may need to be protected from rabbits by using fencing.”

Upham shared a timely calendar to help gardeners plan for a fall harvest:

**Mid-July**
Plant potatoes if you can find them, or use seed potatoes that you might have saved. Do not use freshly dug potatoes because they have a built-in dormancy that will prevent growth. Also, do not use grocery store potatoes; they won’t sprout because they often have been treated.

Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower can be started from seed in mid-July. “Choose a protected place where the soil can be kept moist and rabbits will not bother them,” Upham said, adding that the crops should be transplanted in mid-August.
**Late July**
Seed beets, carrots and beans.

**Late July to early August**
Seed spinach and long-season maturing lettuce. Leaf lettuce will be seeded later.

**Mid- to late August**
Transplant cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower to their final location.

“There is no need to fertilize before planting these crops,” Upham said. “Side dress them two weeks after transplanting, or four weeks after sowing seed by apply 2 tablespoons of a 16-0-0 fertilizer, or 1 tablespoon of 27-33-3 or 30-3-4 fertilizer.”

Upham said liquid fertilizer can also be used (many store brands exist), and should be used according to label instruction. “It would be a good idea to wash off the leaves with clean water to prevent burn from the fertilizer,” he said.

Fall crops should be watered more frequently so that the seed does not dry out. Upham recommends a soaker hose or drip irrigation next to the row, which allows water to slowly seep into the ground. “Overhead watering often causes soil to crust, making it more difficult for young, tender plants to emerge,” he said.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension local offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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