It’s time to plant the fall garden

Plant thick rows, then thin the plants later, says horticulture expert

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Many home gardeners in Kansas are bringing in the bounty from their spring and summer work these days, so Ward Upham understands if the last thing they are thinking about is planting vegetables.

But if they want to keep the harvest going through fall, that’s exactly what they should do.

“Fall gardens will often produce higher quality, more tasty cool-season crops if the vegetables mature during cooler, less stressful temperatures,” said Upham, a horticulture expert at Kansas State University.

For fall gardens, a guideline of when to plant common crops includes:

- **Mid-July:** Plant potatoes if you can find them, or if you saved seed potatoes. Do not use freshly dug potatoes because they have a built-in dormancy that will prevent growth. Grocery store potatoes are often treated so that they don’t sprout.

  Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower can be started from seed at this time. These crops are generally transplanted in mid-August.

- **Late July.** Plant seed beets, carrots and beans.

- **Late July to early August.** Plant seed spinach and long-season maturing lettuce.

- **Second week of August.** Transplant cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower to their final location.

- **Mid- to late August.** Plant seed radishes and leaf lettuce.
Upham said gardeners should plant seeds slightly deeper than they would have in the spring because the seed stays cooler and the soil around the seed remains moist longer.

“Plant seeds more thickly and then thin the plants later,” Upham said. “You may need to put up fencing to protect the plants from rabbits.”

He said gardeners should plan to water more frequently; seeds should not be allowed to dry. “Overhead watering often causes soil to crust, making it more difficult for young plants to emerge. Prevent this by applying a light sprinkling of peat moss, vermiculite or compost directly over the row after seeding.

“Even better,” he adds, “use a soaker hose or drip irrigation right next to the row to allow water to slowly seep into the ground.”

Upham said there is no need to fertilize the ground before planting crops. He suggests applying a side dressing two weeks after transplanting crops, or four weeks after sowing seed by applying two tablespoons of 16-0-0 fertilizer, or one tablespoon of 27-3-3 or 39-3-4 fertilizer per plant.

“You can also use a liquid fertilizer, such as Schultz, Peters, Miracle-Gro or Rapid Grow, according to label directions,” he said. “It would be a good idea to wash off the leaves with clean water to prevent burn from the fertilizer.”

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for keeping yards and gardens healthy and beautiful year-round. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their yard and garden-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu.

Note: Name brands used in this article are for product identification purposes only, and are not intended to be an endorsement of any specific product by K-State Research and Extension.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this article

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit www.ksre.ksu.edu

Story by:
Pat Melgares
785-532-1160
melgares@ksu.edu

For more information:
Ward Upham
785-532-6173
wupham@ksu.edu