



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Cool Season Vegetable Gardening is Cool and Rewarding (November 25, 2023)

Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Vegetable gardening is not just about raising produce for the table, though that is important. It is also about digging in the earth and coaxing seeds and transplants to produce healthy veggies. It is a partnership with the environment. We are lucky in the Central Valley to have a climate that allows year-round gardening instead of having to stare at a snow-swept landscape during the winter months.



Many gardeners, still reeling from trying to keep up with rampant vegetables in their summer gardens, may hesitate to put in cool-weather crops. Others may find some extra space that wasn't available in the spring and summer. A cool-weather vegetable garden is good for both. Cool-weather veggies are much more sedate in their growing habit, and everyone will be delighted with fresh salad and other veggies to perk up winter meals.

New research is showing that a covered planet (of plants) is a healthy planet. It's possible to help control a lot of our climate issues by bringing the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere down into a living plant and putting it back into the soil where it belongs. So, instead of leaving your summer vegetable garden as bare dirt, why not plant some winter vegetables? No need to till your soil; just plant a few seeds!

Even if you don't have a lot of space, crops such as lettuce, which is shallow-rooted, can be grown in flower boxes. Red and green lettuce, along with kale, makes a nice substitute for annual flowers.

Many cool-weather veggies are not very picky about planting dates. Lettuce can be planted from November to March, making successive plantings possible for continuous salad makings. Spinach can be planted from September through February, so if you don't get it in this week or this month, there's still plenty of time. And if you missed getting your edible pod peas planted in August, you have another window of opportunity from mid-November to mid-December.

Bulb onions can be planted from November through March for a continuous supply of green onions. The bulbs usually come in 100-piece bags, but don't plant them all at once; space them out for your salads and stir-fries. Garlic, another flavorful bulb, can be planted from October through December, though it won't be ready until summer. Just take garlic bulbs from the grocery or farmers market and break them into individual cloves to plant.

Broccoli and cauliflower are also not demanding about planting dates. Transplants can be planted now, but if you don't get to it, they can also be planted in February, as can cabbage. Planting a six-pack or two now and again in February can spread out the harvest.

Radishes can be planted from September through April and will produce a crop 30 days after seeding. Winter radishes taste much sweeter than those grown in heat. Experiment with different varieties: red, multicolored, and white. The long, pungent Oriental types are very good.



Cool-weather veggies give gardeners time off for the holidays. All we need to do is harvest the crop for salads and meals and enjoy. Usually, winter rains take care of the watering chore. And during the coolest months, even the weeds grow slowly.

Just when the winter blahs are setting in, we can begin our second round of cool-weather gardening. Endive is very hardy and can be planted in January, but February is a great time for planting beets, turnips, garden peas, carrots, chard, and parsley.

A second round of lettuce and spinach can be planted in February. Plant several varieties--some seed packets come with several different types of lettuce. Romaine is very good and will stand up to some heat. When harvesting lettuce, just snip off the larger leaves rather than pull the plant, and you will have a much longer crop season.

Cool-weather vegetables really lift the spirits in the winter, plus they are generally higher in food value per pound and per square foot than the warm season vegetables because the parts you eat are the vegetative parts: roots-carrots, beets, radishes, turnips; leaves-lettuce, cabbage, onion, spinach; immature flower parts-broccoli, cauliflower. These are generally more packed with food value than the fruit such as tomatoes and squash.

So give the planet, your mental health, and your family's physical health (and taste buds) a boost with an undemanding, peaceful winter garden.

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 12/2, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot

Lindcove Fruit Tasting, 12/9, 9 am – 12 pm, Lindcove Research & Extension Center, 22963 Carson Ave., Exeter, Phone: (559) 592-2408

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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