



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

It's Time to Plant Your Thanksgiving or Christmas Vegetables (September 12, 2020)

by Michelle Le Strange, UCCE Master Gardener Advisor, Emeritus

Want to make Thanksgiving dinner something special for the whole family? Try growing all the vegetables for the side dishes. Growing and preparing your own vegetables is a fine family project and if the rich fresh flavors of the homegrown produce don't surpass your usual vegetable dishes, your sense of accomplishment will. A well-tended garden planted with your favorite vegetables can be very rewarding, and now is just the right time to prepare your thanksgiving garden.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS: For optimum harvest and produce quality, carefully consider your garden's location and choose the best available spot: one that receives at least 8 hours of full sun each day, is relatively level, drains water well, and is close to a water source. Try to plant your garden near your house or tool shed. Garden tasks are less likely forgotten if the plot is in plain view.

SIZE AND SCALE: Vegetable gardens don't have to be big or square. Plant only as large a garden as you can easily maintain. If time is scarce, then start small. Beginning gardeners often over plant and become discouraged with weeding and watering requirements. Even a 3' x 6' space or a few raised beds next to the house can accommodate a small soup and salad garden of herbs and greens.

The conventional garden is laid out in rows with paths between each row. A simple 15' X 20' garden could have 8 beds of vegetables that are 15 feet long. Orient the beds north to south so both sides of the plant receive direct sunlight and place taller crops on the north side of the garden so that they will not shade low-growing crops.

WHAT TO PLANT: Asparagus, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, celery, cilantro, garlic, let tuce, onions, parsnips, radishes, spinach, turnips, and white potatoes grow well in the winter garden. One package of seed generally is enough for a 15' row of vegetables and a family of 3. It may seem obvious, but plant only what you and your family like. Cabbage seedlings grow into large heads, and while a small family may consume the first head with pleasure, the prospect of eating the rest of the row of cabbage may be boring.



HOW TO PLANT: Most vegetables can be seeded in the soil. The depth of planting depends on the size of the seed. A good rule of thumb is to plant to a depth of 2 to 4 times the seed diameter. Oftentimes transplants are used, and most local nurseries stock the most popular winter vegetables.

FUN AND EASY: Two easy vegetables to grow are radishes and carrots. Radishes can be planted from September through March and are ready to eat 3 to 6 weeks after seeding. To assure a continuous supply, plant several successive crops during the season. Harvest radishes when they are the size of a large marble for the best texture and flavor. Signs that radishes are over mature are splits, cracks, hollowness, and pithy roots.

If you like digging for gold, you will love growing your own carrots. Be sure that the soil has been deeply prepared to prevent misshapen carrots. Carrot seed is very small and slow to germinate. It needs to be shallowly planted and evenly spaced so that the carrot has enough room to grow. If the weather is warm, several light sprinklings every day will help insure good germination. After the plants are up, lengthen the interval between watering. Begin harvesting when carrots are about as large as a finger. Maturity occurs about 90 days from seeding. Wait until you taste the difference in flavor from the ones on the grocery shelf!



Don't forget to plant some broccoli and cauliflower. A dozen broccoli transplants can stretch pretty far into the winter. About 90 days after planting broccoli crowns should be ready to pick. Once you harvest the main crown, side shoots sprout and smaller broccoli florets will develop. These tender morsels can be snipped and tossed right into the dinner salad. Cauliflower curds take longer to reach maturity and once they are cut, no new curds will form. If cauliflower leaves get too floppy and open up before curds are ready to harvest, then tie them together with twine to protect the curd from sunlight and keep it stark white.

MAIN PESTS: There will be a few critters to watch for in the late summer and early fall, but their populations should crash when the cooler weather settles in. Aphids and whiteflies love the lettuce greens and the cole crops; start washing them off plants with water at the first sign of their presence and most likely no insecticide will be needed. Worms will need to be picked off or in severe cases treat with a Bt insecticide (even organic growers use Bt) or an insecticide containing spinosad, which is another very safe product.

BE THANKFUL: Most gardeners can only grow a summer garden because of climatic constraints, but in the San Joaquin Valley we can plant a spring, summer, and fall/winter crop and reap 3 crops from one garden. Now that's a bountiful harvest!

In accordance to the Shelter-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events at this time, but if you send us an email or leave a message on our phone lines, someone will call you back!

Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325; Kings County at (559) 852-2736

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