

Winter Vegetables

Q & A

Q: I want to start a winter garden, am I too late? I was reading that I should have started in August or September.

A: It is not too late to start a winter garden. I would recommend that you consider starting with some of the more cold hardy greens such as Kale, chard and collards. These are some of the easiest vegetables to grow, and they are delicious to eat.

Ounce for ounce, collards and kale are the richest in vitamins and minerals of any vegetable, and they are low in calories and fat. Some recent research shows that they may help prevent some types of cancer. Collards, chard and kale tolerate almost any kind of weather, even winter temperatures down to 5° F. The Cold makes them sweeter by converting starches in the leaves to sugar, but they may become somewhat bitter in hot weather.

If you want to start them by seed, late August to mid-September is the best time to sow seed and then plant to transplant into the garden in October. Starting now you will want to start with transplants. Set the plants about 18 inches apart; they get big. They prefer lots of organic matter in the soil, a slightly low pH (about 6), plenty of fertilizer and full sun. Mix compost into planting bed before planting.

The leaves can be harvested in about 2 months when they are about 10-18 inches long. It's best to pick a few leaves off of each plant, and it will keep producing more until temperatures get too hot in summer. The plants will bolt in the spring and summer, but this doesn't seem to hurt the flavor of the leaves. Some types of kale are good harvested when the leaves are small and they can be harvested in just a couple of weeks after planting.

Aphids, cabbage worms and birds may want to share your greens with you; insecticidal soap kills aphids and is very safe to use, or you can wash them off with a blast of water. The cabbage worms can be hand picked off or use Bt (*bacillus thuringiensis*) to control.

Chards and ornamental kale (with the ruffled leaves and white or purple center) are easy to grow, decorative and good to eat. Collards and kale may be substituted for spinach in some recipes, but they have to be cooked 15-20 minutes rather than 30-60 seconds. Spinach turns to green mush if you cook it more than one minute, but kale and collards have a good texture and none of the bitterness of spinach and some other greens. However the stems are very tough and should be removed before cooking.