

## STARTING YOUR WINTER GARDEN

By Wendy Weidenman

Time to think about winter. I know it's hard in 90+ degree weather to think about winter vegetables. However, time is of the essence. In order to give your winter crops a good start, now is the time to get to work.

The first step to putting together a winter garden is knowing what you can grow in your geographic area. Tuolumne County covers a wide range of climatic conditions and elevations, including rain and snow, wind, mild to freezing temperatures and varying soil types from rocky to loamy bottomland.

There are many vegetables that can be grown locally, and it can be a daunting task just to pick out what you want to grow. Great references for vegetable planting dates can be found in this document: <http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/files/149587.pdf>. Another easy guide to help you decide: Farmer's Almanac offers an on-line Planting Dates Calculator. Go to [www.almanac.com/gardening](http://www.almanac.com/gardening), and look for Planting Calendar. Once there, enter your zip code or city/town name. In addition to planting dates, this chart provides harvest dates as well. Another great chart, though not specific to our area, is: [mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu](http://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu). Search pdf 241030. These different websites will help you decide what vegetables to focus on.

I recommend staying away from Brussel sprouts. Although they can be grown in our area, they are very time consuming. I tried last year and found I had to jet spray them daily to control the aphids. They are also extremely slow to develop. Long story short, I ended up with very small, underdeveloped sprouts that simply went into the compost pile. Celery is another difficult winter crop. It is a heavy feeder and requires a lot of water. The water probably won't be an issue if we have another wet winter like this year. However, both Brussel sprouts and celery are best grown on the coast where there is high humidity and the temperature changes are not so dramatic. I have had great luck with cauliflower, broccoli, snap peas for mid-season, lettuce, onions and herbs. I suggest you keep it simple, grow what does best where you live, and reap the rewards of your work.

Another thing to think about is the winter snow. If you live in a higher elevation where the snow stays on the ground for a while, consider some kind of protection for your plants. Last year when we got snow I protected my raised beds with row covers. They are very easy to make with PVC for the framing, and a fairly heavy mil polypropylene. Most important, be sure to provide a way for heat to escape if the sun comes out during the day. The plastic-covered raised bed can heat up to 130 degrees with just one hour of sun exposure. Excellent information on how to build various types of row covers can be found at [www.ucanr.edu](http://www.ucanr.edu) and search 'row covers.'

Prepping is much the same as for a summer garden. Do a soil test to see what might be lacking. The next step is to prepare the planting bed. Because there is abundant rain in the winter, raised beds and/or containers can be the perfect way to control the excess moisture that

Mother Nature sends our way each winter. Prepare your beds by loosening 18" to 24" of soil and working in a 3" layer of compost and organic fertilizer. Pass on the fertilizer for the beds you'll be growing root crops in, they don't like fertilizer.

Plan your planting strategy. Think about compatible companion planting. Although cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower are closely related, and require similar nutrients, it's best not to plant them together. They are all heavy feeders, depleting the soil of required nutrients; plus, they will attract the same pests and diseases.

Although pest control is easier in the winter, you will probably have some irritating freeloaders. You can make your own inexpensive organic pest control products using mashed garlic paste with a little cayenne pepper or horseradish. Add a small amount of this mixture to a gallon of water and let it sit for a day or two, shaking occasionally. Then spray on the affected plant. Spray just a few leaves to make sure it's not so strong that it burns the plant. Aphids can be controlled by adding Lemon Joy dishwashing soap mixed at a rate of one once per gallon of water.

Now, go out and get your hands dirty.

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*UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/) You can also find us on Facebook.*