

# Planning your Fall Vegetable Garden

## Master Gardener Program of Santa Clara County



### **Key ideas**

- *In our Mediterranean climate, we can grow fresh vegetables year-round.*
- *Cool season gardening has many advantages.*
- *A wide variety of vegetables grow very well in our cool season.*

### **1. Cool season gardening**

#### Why garden year round?

- Mediterranean climate: warm, dry summer and cool, wet winter
- Efficient use of garden space
- Fresh vegetables year round
- Can avoid some pests/diseases

#### Advantages of cool season gardening

- Slow growth, long holding time, vegetables are “refrigerated” right in the ground
- Less work: fewer weeds & pests, not as much watering needed
- Some crops taste better after light frost (cabbage family: broccoli, cauliflower, kale)

#### Know where your sun is

- Shorter days, overcast, lower sun path
- More shade from buildings, less shade from deciduous trees
- Need full sun, at least 6 hours. Some greens (lettuce, spinach) can do with less

#### Watering

- Rain! Still need irrigation: getting seedlings started, periods of no/little rain
- Less needed because weather is cooler

#### Soil Preparation

- Santa Clara County’s clay soils are very fertile, but its small particle size means it compacts easily and drains too slowly for many vegetables
- To improve your soil texture, incorporate compost into the top 6-10” of soil: between 20%-33% by volume (2-3 inches of compost incorporated into 10” of soil)
- The only supplemental nutrient generally needed is nitrogen, which should be added to soil at planting and lightly every 3-4 weeks during the growing season
  - While compost contains nitrogen, the amount available varies greatly, so consider using additional forms of nitrogen such as alfalfa, fish meal or blood meal.

#### When to plant

- Get started early: late summer through early fall; or early spring
- Transplants allow you to plant later, giving summer crops more time to mature
- Starting seeds and seedlings
  - Soil temperature, germination
  - Starting outdoors: dappled shade, morning sun

#### A guideline calendar

- July/August: Start seeds in containers for cole crops
- August/September: Start seeds in containers for greens, beets, peas
- September/October
  - Transplant cole crops, greens, peas, beets

- Seed peas, carrots and beets in place
- Start onion seeds in containers
- October/November
  - Continue transplanting greens
  - Plant garlic and shallot bulbs
- November/December: Plant onion seedlings
- February/March: Can plant many vegetables again in spring, before summer crops

### 3. Cool season vegetables

#### Salad greens

- Lettuce – Butterhead, batavian, romaine, leaf, mixes
- Plant closely for cut & come again or 6-10" apart for heads
- Start in pots 4-6 weeks ahead of time or direct seed
- Will bolt and go to seed when weather becomes too warm or with age, gets bitter
- Pests: snails & slugs
  - Hand pick at night, especially first few weeks
  - Find hiding places: cool, damp, shaded. Set out boards, bricks, flowerpots
  - Use iron phosphate (e.g. Sluggo); don't overuse
- Pests: birds
  - Irregular holes in leaves, not just on edges
  - Protect seedlings with netting or row cover

#### Chard

- Start in pots 4-6 weeks ahead of time or direct seed 10-12" apart
- Pick outer leaves (pull rather than cut) and continue harvesting for months
- Pests: leafminers
  - Look for trails in leaves
  - Cut off and throw away (not compost) infected leaves
- Pests: aphids (mostly a problem in the spring)
  - Look for curled leaves, sticky surfaces, ants
  - Don't over-fertilize; aphids are attracted to tender growth
  - Wash off with sharp spray of water
  - Many beneficial insects (e.g., ladybug larvae) prey on aphids

#### Kale

- Start in pots 4-6 weeks ahead of time or direct seed 10-12" apart
- Pick outer leaves (pull rather than cut) and continue harvesting for months
- Favorite varieties: Red Russian, Lacinato
- Pests: aphids, see under chard, above

#### Asian greens: bok choy, tatsoi, etc.

- Start in pots 3 weeks ahead of time or direct seed 6-8" apart
- Pick outer leaves (pull rather than cut) or cut whole plants
- Very fast growing; plant several times a few weeks apart to have a continuous supply.

#### Peas

- English/shelling, sugar snap, snow peas (pea pods)
- Start in pots 3-4 weeks ahead of time or direct seed 3-4" apart
- Need trellis support, even short varieties. Run trellis north-south if possible
- Harvest shelling and sugar snaps when pods are full, but before they become lumpy and starchy. Harvest snow peas when full size but still flat

- Powdery mildew: For best results, plant peas in fall, not spring. Full sun
- Pests: slugs, snails, and birds nip off emerging seedlings

### Broccoli

- Cabbage family (cole crops, brassicas)
- Start seeds in pots 4-6 weeks ahead, transplant in Sept-Oct, 12-24" apart
- Harvest main head when full but not spreading; harvest sideshoots for 2-3 more months
- Pests: Imported cabbageworm & cabbage looper
  - Same color as plant, often found along rib
  - Handpick, grow under row cover, encourage predators
- Pests: Bagrada Bug
  - Relatively new invasive species, 5-8mm, similar in appearance to harlequin bug but 1/3 the size, reproduces in cole crops
  - Report if you notice in your garden: Ag Commission or Master Gardeners

### Other cabbage family plants

- Cauliflower: prima donnas, one-shots, needs 2-3 foot spacing
- Kohlrabi: delicious raw, leaves tasty too. Plant closely, 6" apart
- Brussels sprouts: Needs to start early, transplant in early August at latest

### Root crops: beets, carrots, parsnips, radishes, turnips, rutabagas

- Grown mainly for their roots, some have edible greens
- Need loose soil that allows roots to penetrate easily and grow straight
- Can be harvested when needed, over weeks or months

### References

- Pamela Geisel, *Vegetable Gardening Basics*, publication 8059, University of California Agriculture & Natural Resources, [anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8059.pdf](http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8059.pdf)
- Dennis R. Pittenger, *California Master Gardener Handbook* (Oakland: Regents of the University of California, Agriculture & Natural Resources publication 3382, 2002)
- "UC IPM Online, Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program", accessed April 2011, [ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://ipm.ucdavis.edu)

### Resources

- Master Gardener Hotline for gardening-related questions: 408-282-3105 or [mastergardeners.org/ask-a-question](http://mastergardeners.org/ask-a-question): This is a free service for residents of Santa Clara County
- "Santa Clara County Warm & Cool Season Vegetable Planting Charts:" [mastergardeners.org/warm-cool-veg-charts](http://mastergardeners.org/warm-cool-veg-charts)
- "The California GardenWeb", Vegetable-specific Website accessed August 2014, [cagardenweb.ucanr.edu/Vegetables/](http://cagardenweb.ucanr.edu/Vegetables/)
- Pamela Peirce, *Golden Gate Gardening*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2010)
- Editors, *Sunset Magazine, The New Sunset Western Garden Book* (Oxmoor House, 2013)

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