

**The Press Democrat**  
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**ADVICE TO GROW BY » SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**  
**Use fava beans for cooking or cover crop to enrich soil and August in the garden**



**Robbie Pengelly/Sonoma Index-Tribune. Christopher Landercaster stands behind a crop of fava beans at Cornerstone Sonoma. Late summer is the time to plant fava beans.**

Question: I would like to try growing fava beans but don't know much about them. I've only grown scarlet runner beans in the past. Can you offer some tips?

Answer: Sure! Fava beans can be a wonderful addition to your home garden. They are easy to grow, tasty and highly nutritious. This versatile plant can be grown either for food or as a soil cover crop.

Fava beans are native to the Mediterranean region. Also known as broad, Windsor and bell beans, they are one of the oldest cultivated plants known, dating back to prehistoric times. They are bushy, growing 2 to 7 feet tall, with white or purplish flowers in clusters on short stalks.

As a food crop, fava beans are grown as a cool-season vegetable. Optimum growing temperatures are 70 to 80 degrees, but the plants are resistant to frost damage down to at least 21 degrees. Treat your seeds with a legume inoculant specifically formulated for fava beans.

Sow them now for a late-fall harvest, or in late summer to November for early-spring picking. Plant seeds 1 to 2 inches deep and 3 to 5 inches apart. Since they can grow quite large, thin the sprouts to 8 to 10 inches apart, allowing 2 to 3 feet between rows. Harvest the young pods and eat them whole or let them grow to maturity and harvest the beans inside the pod. You can also leave the pods on the plant until both the pod and beans are dry.

When stored correctly, the dry beans can last up to three years. As a note of caution, some people of Mediterranean origin have an enzyme deficiency that can cause a severe allergic reaction.

If you've never eaten fava beans, test a small sample first.

Fava beans also make an excellent cover crop. Known as green manures, cover crops are plants grown primarily to benefit the soil rather than for consumption.

They are cut down in early spring and incorporated into the soil, thus increasing organic material that feeds microorganisms and improves soil structure.

They also have a long tap root that breaks up heavy soil. As a legume, they have the additional value of being able to capture atmospheric nitrogen in root nodules. Here, specialized bacteria make it available in a form for uptake by your spring and summer crops.

When planting fava beans as a cover crop, use an inoculant. Plant them from late September through late October, thinning the seeds to one plant per square foot. About three to six weeks before planting your spring vegetables, cut the foliage down to the ground and chop it up well.

Dig the chopped foliage into the soil of your planting beds as a green manure crop to nurture your soil.

Cut the foliage down earlier if the plants are starting to flower. Otherwise, nitrogen in the root nodules will be transferred from the roots to developing beans.

For no-till gardening, add the chopped foliage to your compost pile. Once the green manure is well-composted, layer it onto your vegetable bed.

For additional tips on growing fava beans, see:

UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County: <https://bitly.ws/Q4Wk>

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources: <https://bitly.ws/Q4WB>

How to harvest and freeze fava beans: <https://bitly.ws/Q4WI>

Green manure cover crops: <https://bitly.ws/Q4X5>

Cover cropping in home vegetable gardens: <https://bitly.ws/Q4X8>

### **August in the garden**

Summer may not be over yet, but it's time to start planning your fall and winter garden. Still enjoying those fruits and veggies you planted in spring? Sow or plant them in and around existing summer vegetables.

- From seed: beets, bunch onions, calendula, carrot, chives, dill, greens (bok choy, Swiss chard, kale, mustard, radicchio), leeks, nasturtium, parsley, parsnip and peas
- From starts: artichoke, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and fennel bulb

This is a good time to evaluate your summer garden and make notes for next spring. What worked and what didn't? What produced well? What were your favorite varieties? Did you plant too early? Should you move something to give it more or less sunlight? Should you add compost to your garden beds?

Clean and tidy up your garden to keep it healthy by removing dead and decaying plant material that can attract pests, which may damage healthy plants.

Remove older leaves on some plants, like squash vines, that may naturally turn yellow and die. Remove them early to allow the plant's energy to go into the actively growing parts.

Pick up fallen fruit that can create an environment for disease-causing pathogens and attract rodents.

Pull weeds that compete with your plants for water, nutrients and sunlight and can attract pests.

Clean your garden tools after each use to avoid spreading pathogens from infected plants. Sterilize your tools with one part household bleach diluted with nine parts water. Dry and store them in a moisture-free area to prevent rust.

For more information on cool-season vegetable gardening, go to <https://bit.ly/3AMYnP5>.

*Contributors to this week's column were Wendy Stern, Patricia Rosales, Debbie Westrick and Robert Williams. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County, <https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu>, provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to [scmgpd@gmail.com](mailto:scmgpd@gmail.com). You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or [mgsonoma@ucanr.edu](mailto:mgsonoma@ucanr.edu).*