

Late Summer Garden Planting

By Jerry Clark, Agriculture Agent

Many early planted and cool season garden crops are already harvested or are being harvested. Sometimes, we think that section of the garden is finished for the year and, if we are not careful, it will grow into weeds. The management of these early harvested areas has a lot of potential for more produce or more problems. If you have early harvested produce in your garden, think about planting it again with fall harvested vegetables.

After harvesting early-maturing vegetables such as salad greens, radishes, peas and spinach, gardeners can plant other crops in midsummer for fall harvest. You can successfully grow some root crops, greens and other vegetables from late July and August plantings. A few key points to consider are crucial to successful late summer plantings.

It is important to know the average first frost date in your area. This will help you calculate when to plant these late vegetables so they will mature before cold weather damage. The Midwestern Regional Climate Center has produced an up-to-date interactive map of first fall and last spring freeze dates. In general, Chippewa County's first frost date averages around September 25. Keep this date in mind when planting late.

Some vegetables will tolerate some frost and keep growing even when temperatures are in the low forties. Others cannot tolerate frost and stop growing in cool weather. Bush snap beans mature in 45 to 65 days, but even a light frost (temperatures between 30° and 32°) will kill the plants. Kale takes just as long to mature, but the plants continue to grow when temperatures are cool, and can survive cold down to about 20°F.

Cool-season vegetables including kale and others in the cabbage family may be the best choice for mid-summer planting. An earlier-than-expected frost will not kill them before they are ready to eat. Many of the cold-tolerant vegetables have better quality when grown in cool weather. You can harvest leafy vegetables, such as Swiss chard, kale and mustard greens before the leaves reach full size. These small leaves are tenderer and tastier than mature ones. Plant these crops in succession every few weeks over the course of the spring and summer to provide a steady supply of young leaves.

Lettuce may bolt and taste bitter when grown in the heat of summer. Enjoy it in spring or wait until temperatures cool to plant a late crop. Shade from taller plants may help improve the quality of summer-grown lettuce, as will selecting varieties suited for warm weather.

Do not forget about herbs. Basil and cilantro are fast-growing herbs that are ready for harvest about a month after sowing the seed. Garlic planted in September produces the biggest bulbs the following July. After harvesting a late-maturing crop, you can plant garlic in that space.

Before sowing these second crops, turn over the soil and mix in some balanced fertilizer to replace what earlier plants have used up. Leftover debris like stems or roots from the first planting can cause problems in seed germination if you do not remove them or allow them to break down. Wait one to two weeks before seeding the second crop or be sure to remove this material as completely as possible.

Weed management is always an issue in gardening. After all, gardening is weeding. If it is too late to plant a second crop of vegetables, you may want to plant "green manure" to keep the area weed-free,

prevent soil erosion and add organic matter to the soil. Small grain crops such as oats or barley are great choices to provide some cover and compete with weeds. These crops will die over winter and provide beneficial organic matter for your garden.

The growing season has a couple of months left. Gardeners can take advantage of their garden space by planting again in areas where harvest has already occurred.