

SEPT – VEGETABLE GARDENING 101

Last month we talked about what vegetable problems, diseases and pests to be on the lookout for and in Sept, we should continue to keep an eye out for these things as the garden starts to wind down.

Also I want to encourage new gardeners to plant a fall vegetable garden, even if it is a little one-maybe one bed. Fall is also a great time to plant new plants and fruit trees. The cool weather helps them adjust easier without the heat and many bugs become a non-issue as it starts to get cold and they don't take as much water with the cooler weather.

Let's take a look at some veggies to still plant in Sept in that little bed.

Some cool season crops-these are vegetables that prefer cooler weather. My cool season crop list is bigger than my warm season crops but now I wouldn't try even all of them now. I put transplants in as we only have about 60 days until the possibility of a freeze occurs. I generally think sometime around Oct 15 we should be prepared for a freeze:

Cool season crops-endive, kale, lettuce, mesclun, mustard, chard and kale. I grow these from seeds or get transplants. Be prepared for colder nights soon by getting some row cover to throw over your plants on the colder nites but be sure to take it off in the morning.

Plant herbs that thrive in cool weather like chervil, cilantro and chives-either transplants or seeds. Parsley takes a while to germinate so buy transplants. Speaking of herbs, we should all be harvesting ours and drying them right now.

Plant fruit trees and shrubs. Fall is a great time for planting trees as the trees focus on root growth. I'm going up to Tooleys Trees in Truchas this week to pick up a peach, plumb and pear tree and two elderberry bushes. All of these should get established before winter sets in with such a lovely fall. Just be sure to dig a big enough hole as deep as the container it comes in and twice as wide. Add compost in as it is the only time you'll get to improve the soil deeply and don't plant trees deeper than they were in their containers.

Plant garlic and shallots-Now is the time in late September up through around October 15 BEFORE the first frost to plant garlic and shallots. Be sure to enrich the soil with compost before you plant them as they are big feeders. The bulbs will concentrate on root growth in the fall and you will get a crop sooner next summer.

How to tell when to harvest vegetables:

Beans-by now you should have bushels of beans which are best harvested before the beans swell inside the pods unless you grew the dry beans in which case you want the beans to swell and dry out. Examples of these would be pinto beans. We cook the dry bean. Of course if you planted heirloom varieties of any bean, you can let some of them stay on the vine and dry out and save the seeds. But don't do that till you are basically done with them as the plant will stop producing.

Kale-Keep harvesting the leaves but look for aphids which return with the cooler weather. Rinse off with a strong spray of water or use Neem in the evening before the sun goes down. I pull my

kale out just before the ground freezes which is usually in December. I usually dry some of my kale leaves to eat like chips later.

Carrots and Beets- Continue to thin out if needed and harvest as you want to eat them. For spacing these vegetables so they can get to a decent size, I leave one finger width between carrots and three finger widths for beets. You can eat the beet greens as well as the beets too. They will last till the ground freezes and even longer.

Tomatoes-harvest every week but now is the time to give the plants a trim too. You can trim off new growth or very small tomatoes as they will not have time to ripen before the season ends. But don't cut off everything. You'll need to pick most green tomatoes before it freezes because if you wait till afterwards, they'll be ruined.

Peppers-They should be ready to cut off. Many things you can do with peppers-grill, peel, freeze them and for skinner thin peppers, just saute them and eat them. Poblano peppers (the pepper used for chile rellano) are ready along with many other peppers.

Corn-Corn is ready when the silks dry out. Right now my corn has the tassles and only one has the silk so far.

Eggplants-can be harvested by cutting them off anytime they are shiny looking. Then they are mature.

Onions-most are almost ready to pull if you planted early in the season. Just be sure to put them in a shady place and let them dry out with the dirt on them. This is called curing them and after the skins are dry, you can knock off the dirt. To rinse them off will make them rot sooner.

Squash-Summer squash is best picked young but winter squash needs to stay on the vine to mature and cure. This means usually you don't harvest till just before or after a frost. Many winter squash will last for months in your house.

Melons-usually if they have tendrils, it dries up close to the fruit, but also the stem starts to dry up as well. Same goes for other melons. This year I think I'm actually going to get a watermelon before it freezes. I've never planted watermelon before and most varieties take between 90-100 days to ripen.

September might be your last month to really enjoy your new garden, so get out there before the cold hits. If we are lucky, we may get a long fall like last year and be able to continue to grow and harvest through October. In Sept -October we can start to pull anything that is done. Be sure to clean up your garden before winter sets in and I will talk about that in October. We are almost done through a season for a new gardener.

