

Food Gardening Tips for Fall to Spring Gardening in the SF Bay Area
to Accompany Year-Round Growing Information in Golden Gate Gardening
by Pam Peirce, Author of *Golden Gate Gardening & Wildly Successful Plants: Northern California*

August into early September:

Sow seeds of leaf lettuce varieties in a cool, shady spot, or plant out lettuce transplants. Some of the best lettuce varieties for winter production are oakleaf types, 'Salad Bowl', and winter romaines. Check seed catalog listings. Sow seed of arugula, cilantro, mustard, upland cress, cold-tolerant spinach varieties, maches, radish, mizuna, & other mustards. In August, set out seedlings of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, collards, gai lon, kohlrabi. If root maggots have appeared, wrap stems with floral tape or plastic strips. Check leaf undersides for insect eggs & aphids weekly until weather cools in October. Crush eggs or aphids. For severe aphid infestations, use a purchased insecticidal oil spray. Of the "choys," tatsoi does well in winter and is not as popular with snails/slugs as pak choy and other Chinese cabbages. Set out plants of Florence fennel & celeriac. (In inland parts of the region, root crops can be planted into Sept or later—see calendar.) If leafminers have damaged chard recently, plant out seedlings in mid-August or in Sept., protect with row cover until cold weather in mid-October, after which the leafminers are usually inactive until March.

September-October:

In the garden, plant out transplants of lettuce; sow seeds of arugula, mustards, cilantro, maches, etc. (as for Aug-Sept). Plant garlic sets (single, unpeeled cloves), using garlic purchased from a nursery to ensure undiseased plants, for harvest in late June. Sow seeds of miner's lettuce in a shady, moist place just as the rains begin in October. September may be too late for cole crops to reach full size in foggiest gardens, but inland, even October may be fine.

November

In the garden, plant artichoke container or bareroot plants; plant fava bean seed. In coast-influenced gardens, plant pea seed. (Protect young pea plants from slugs/snails & birds with row cover. Use a 4-5-foot trellis covered with wire fencing for bush pea support, a 6-foot one for pole peas. Snap peas give you the most harvest for a small space.

December-April

Indoors, start leek seeds in November, December or as late as April and set plants out in garden after 8-10 weeks. Indoors, start seeds of early varieties of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, & kale--end of Dec. to end of Jan.; plant out in 5-7 weeks. See Aug-Sept for pest precautions. Begin checking leaf undersides for insect eggs weekly in March. Indoors, in Jan or Feb, start, seed of lettuce, frisée, escarole, radicchio, & plant out in 3-5 weeks or when weather allows. In garden, in January thru March, plant certified, disease-free potato sets, seed of carrot, beet, spinach, mustard, chard, parsnip, peas, favas, arugula, cilantro, parsley, & mustards. In February, plant seeds or sets of day-neutral or intermediate day onions. In the garden, plant seed of calendula, Johnny-jump-up, nasturtium, & borage. These edible flowers will be available for spring/summer harvests and will often resow themselves and bear late into fall and again by late winter.

May-June

indoors or in seeding containers outside, plant seeds of early or late Brussels sprouts; plant it out in 5-7 weeks (To decide when to plant seeds, subtract days to maturity from December 1 and count back 5-7 more weeks.)

June-July

Indoors or in seeding containers outside, plant seeds of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, collards, gai lon, kohlrabi; plant out in 5-7 weeks. For a longer harvest, choose both early and late, or overwintering, varieties of cabbage, broccoli, & cauliflower. Sow seed of Florence fennel & celeriac, indoors or in the garden. Direct-sow spinach & cilantro. In the garden, in July, sow directly seeds of carrot, beet, and parsnip for fall/winter harvest. (check GGG calendars for later inland planting dates.) Start chard indoors in July if you plan to grow your own seedlings to plant out in fall for winter harvest to avoid leafminer damage. In cool summer areas, start lettuce from seed or set out seedlings.

Hardiness of Cool Season Vegetable Crops

****Very hardy:** May live through frosts as low as 0°F.

leeks, spinach, late Brussels sprouts, overwintering varieties of broccoli, savoy, red and overwintering varieties of green cabbage, overwintering cauliflower varieties, collards, kale, parsnip, Swiss chard, turnip, parsley, sage, thyme, sorrel.

****Hardy:** Mostly go through frosts of 10°F.

summer broccoli, early Brussels sprouts, spring cabbage varieties, early cauliflower varieties, Chinese cabbage, radish, mustard, broccoli raab, fava beans, beets, carrots, celeriac, Florence fennel, lettuce, chervil, cilantro, rosemary.

****Half-hardy:** Dies at freezing, or at most below 18°F. Kohlrabi.

****Not hardy to frost:**

Peas are best at 50-64°F, minimum of 45°F, damaged by hard frost (but in my experience, have not shown frost damage in a light frost.)

Potatoes are best at 60-65°F, and the tops are damaged by frost. I often start them in February, after frost danger is past but while it is still quite cold, and they thrive.

(Some of this information is from Binda Colebrook's *Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest*)

Year-Round Gardening and Biennial Crops

Biennials for winter harvest must be planted early enough in the year that they can mature before the period of maximum winter cold (December and January), since a period of weather below 45°F will stimulate them to bloom, and in most cases, it is the plant before it blooms that we want to eat. The crops that are biennials include carrots, beets, chard, fennel, parsnip, celeriac, kale, onion, leeks, and varieties of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower that overwinter. The amount of time these crops need in order to mature before the cold weather sets in varies, depending on how fast they grow and whether they can continue to grow once weather turns cold.

For example, carrots will grow and form roots only when the weather is still warm. They need an average of 3 months to mature. In San Francisco, I plant them in July for a fall/winter harvest. Inland, where late summer temperatures are warmer, they can be planted in August, or even later. Whenever they are planted, they will stop growing in the winter, but you can still dig and eat them till they flower in March. When they flower, the root will become hard and shriveled. (I always let one plant bloom, because they are excellent attractors of beneficial insects.)

As another example, leeks mature very slowly. The best time to plant them is in late winter or early spring, so they can become large by the following autumn. You can eat them while they are still small, but they reach the size of commercial leeks by about September. They hold in the ground and may get a bit larger over winter, but you must eat them by the following March, or they flower, developing a tough core and eventually becoming completely tough.

Or suppose you want to grow kale or collards for winter harvest. They continue to grow through winter, but more slowly than when it is warmer. Planted too late in autumn, the plants stay small. All of the plants will start to bloom in about March, which marks a decline in leaf production, so you may as well plant earlier and get more to harvest before they bloom. (But here is a tip—stems of collard flower buds are delicious. Snap them off a few inches long and use like broccoli raab or gai lan. The harvest will continue several months in spring if you harvest before flowers open and prune unproductive stems back a couple of times.)

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****Check my website and my blog for dates, subjects, and locations of upcoming lectures****

Golden Gate Gardening includes 4 full planting calendars, one each for foggy and sunnier parts of Sunset Zone 17, one for Zone 16, and one for Zone 15. The book also includes all the information you need to grow food successfully in the Bay Area, and recipes chosen to make use the crops you are most likely to grow. The book *Wildly Successful Plants: Northern California* offers a primer on ornamental gardening in our region featuring 50 drought-tolerant, pest-resistant, local heirloom ornamentals (It is out of print—look for it used on biblio.com.)

My web site, www.pampeirce.com, includes a quick link to an archive of my S.F. Chronicle/sfgate.com columns. Another quick link leads to my blog, goldengategarden.typepad.com, which includes photo essays and information on native plants, wildly successful and other ornamentals, pest management, growing vegetables, herbs, and fruits, and recipes. You can email me through my web site or send questions as comments to my blog.