



Pat Neasbitt
Master Gardener

Fall gardening begins in July

Some of the best quality vegetables in Oklahoma are harvested in the fall when warm sunny days are followed by cool, humid nights. Fall is the perfect season to garden - no bugs, no watering, no weeds, and no sweat – at least not nearly as much as in the summer. It's hard to think about planting a garden when it's near 100 degrees outside, and we are dragging hoses every day just to keep plants alive. Those dedicated gardeners who do brave the heat and plant a fall garden will be rewarded when temperatures cool and the fall rains come.

- The most important part of preparing the fall garden is improving the soil. Compost will add soil fertility and retain moisture, which will also help cool the soil.
- Select seeds that mature quickly so they can be harvested before frost. The easiest plants for fall are leafy greens like spinach, kale, collards, mustard, and lettuce. You can also sow seeds of turnips and radishes. If you grow your own, or can find transplants of broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprouts, and cauliflower, they are much better in the fall garden than the spring garden.
- Mulch the area to be planted to cool the soil. Soil temperatures can reach 140 degrees in the summer sun, and that means quick death for seeds and seedlings.
- One way to reduce soil temperature is to plant in furrows, which are long shallow trenches. Place seeds in the bottom of the furrow and cover the recommended depth with soil, but do not fill the furrow. The seedlings will be partially shaded inside the furrow and kept cooler. Seeds require constant moisture to germinate. If they dry out, they will die immediately. Flooding the furrows saves water and keeps the seeds moist so they can germinate.
- Another way to give seedlings an advantage in the summer heat is to shade them. Shading helps to reduce soil temperature and prevents excess evaporation. One of the best and easiest devices to shade plants is a tent made from old window screens. Remove shade materials once seedlings have emerged and are established. You could do something as simple as laying a

board over the furrow or covering it with wet newspapers or straw mulch. Just be sure to check often and remove the covering as soon as seedlings start to sprout.

- Mulch the new plantings. Mulch helps to retain moisture, cool the soil, keep weed competition down, and enrich the soil as it breaks down.
- Another helpful practice is to soak seeds overnight before planting. Seeds must absorb water in order to germinate, and this will speed up the process. It is best not to soak bean seeds because they can absorb too much moisture and crack, causing poor germination. A better procedure for bean seeds is to wrap them in a damp paper towel inside a plastic bag overnight.
- Be creative by using what is available in your garden. Make seed furrows on the east side of existing tomato or okra plants to prevent exposure to the hot western sun. Plant beets, turnips, and radishes under okra to take advantage of shade that will help cool the soil. A little sweat now will pay off with vegetables maturing during the cooler days of fall when we can enjoy working in our gardens and appreciate the bountiful fall harvest.
- Last week to enroll in ***Gardening You Can Do in The Hot Summer Months***, a gardening class that Betty Sue Tow and I will be teaching at Southern Tech. We will give suggestions on gardening tasks and projects you can do this summer and ideas on how to plan for the fall gardening season. We always provide lots of information on which plants to use and how to plant and care for them to make your garden healthy, beautiful, and enjoyable. Classes are enrolling now at Southern Tech and will be on Mondays from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM beginning July 22nd and going through August 26th. Hope to see you in class and Happy Summer Gardening!