



Planting for Fall

Act now for cool-weather veggies.

With summer in the Willamette Valley just getting under way, fall seems a long way off. But if you want a fall and winter vegetable garden, now is the time to get started. With this in mind I paid a visit to my friend Kit Kirkpatrick, who gardens just off River Road on 12 feet of silty river-bottom loam and loves to talk about it. She began by letting me know what a tough year it's been so far.

"Hail shredded the blossoms on the apples, cherries and an Italian plum," Kit told me. "Any raspberry with a tendency to root rot, rotted." The evidence — withered brown canes in her berry patch — was all too visible. Strawberries have done better, except for the gray mold. Cool, wet weather also meant that seeds became soaked and rotted before they could germinate. Kit sowed carrots twice, and her corn was a complete failure. Slugs and snails, she said, "were monumental." But it has been a good year for lettuce and artichokes, and her potatoes looked fine.

Now Kit is getting ready to sow carrots yet again. "Carrots are one of the best things to grow for the winter," she says. "I usually sow four rows by July 15. They'll come to fruition in October. I leave them in the ground and pull them all winter. Around the first warm weather in March, the roots will start to grow again and it is time to pull all you have left, before they get woody." Kit favors carrot varieties 'Chantenay' and 'Flakkee Trofeo.'

Other root crops go in at about the same time, and these too may be left in the ground until you need them. What does Kit grow? "Beyond carrots," she says, "it's a matter of what you can sell to your family." She likes to grow beets and parsnips, for instance, but her husband John isn't fond of them. "Last year I grew rutabagas. They were pretty good. He eats them if I mash them up with potatoes. Parsnips, too." 'Cobham' is really beautiful parsnip, according to Kit, "a frilly, female sort of plant," but difficult to germinate.

"If you want to have a fall garden, think ahead," Kit advises. You want to be sure you have ground that will open up by mid-July

(space that was occupied by peas, for instance) and that will still be sunny as we move into fall. Besides root crops, broccoli and cauliflower go in by mid-July. Those two last all winter, and begin to grow again in spring. "Broccoli is great in spring, but cauliflower gets kind of coarse. Cabbage planted in summer makes a really nice head."

Russian Kale is another of the best things to grow in fall for eating through winter into spring, when the flavor is "fantastic." Not everyone eats kale, though! For beets, Kit favors Lutz Greenleaf because the greens also make good eating, and John prefers them to kale. Leeks are another worthwhile crop that will hold until winter. Kit grows leeks (like broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower) from starts she buys at Down to Earth. She says the best starts are sturdy little leeks about as thick as a pencil, that come in a soil-free bundle.

Leafy greens are sown in late August, or as soon as the weather cools a little. They will hold for months if you can cover them when night temperatures threaten to drop to freezing. Kit will put in spinach, Swiss chard 'Rhubarb' and 'Mizuna' mustard, as well as the lettuce 'Brunia' (Oakleaf). August-sown arugula does well, too, and does not bolt in fall. Kit's friend Deborah Brady, a long-time winter salad grower, suggests trying a whole variety of greens, including tatsoi, pak choy, radicchio, parsley and cilantro; lettuces 'Continuity,' 'Red Sails' and 'Arctic King,' and "a package of Mixed Mustard seed."

OSU Extension publications *EC 1247* and *PNW 548* include tips for extending your harvest with cloches and row covers. Kit uses simple, polyethylene-covered hoop structures.

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Rachel Foster of Eugene is a garden consultant and author of All About Gardens, a selection of past Eugene Weekly columns. She can be reached at rfoster@efn.org

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