

AUGUST

Fall Plantings... Already?!

While it may seem a bit early to be thinking about fall since summer just started, many fall seeds should be started in early to mid-August. “But I’m still waiting for my tomatoes to ripen!” you say... You can amend the remainder of your plot available and let it sit or ‘cook’ for a couple of weeks. Make sure you add good compost and/or chicken manure in order to put additional nutrients into the soil in preparation. Check our “Resource” section on the website for possible nutrient cocktail.

Crops to Sow in August

- Beets
- Broccoli
- Celery
- Collards
- Green Onions
- Winter Squash
- Cabbage
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cauliflower

Many of the August sown crops require moisture constancy and shade. The heat of a Zone 9 summer can dry out soil quickly and lead to a low germination rate. For those plants that are going to be sown outdoors, it’s important to keep the soil moisture constant. A light mulch helps keep the soil surface from crusting.

So select the crops that you want to grow in the fall, find the best place to grow them and start to sow the seeds, indoors or out!

Seeds such as kale, beets, carrots, peas, collards, and radishes can be planted directly in the plot.

In addition, fall is the time your strawberries put out “runners” (small plants that extend from the old plant on a thin vine.) Cut about an inch of the vine on each side of the plant. Look closely on the underside of the plant and you’ll notice small hairs. These are roots. Simply put the plant on damp soil and it will root itself. Do not cover the leaves with soil. Keep well watered and feed to allow the new plants to take root. Strawberries like an acidic soil. The size of next summer’s fruit is determined this month and next, the more fertilizer and irrigation, the bigger the berries will be next spring!

How much you harvest in August can be a starting point in determining what to plant-or not to plant-next time around! Now you know from experience that the whole packet of zucchini seeds, or all six plants from the pony pack, produces way too many squash! Next time, you’ll make do with just one or two plants, even though they start out so small but can take over your entire garden plot! Spacing is very important too. Don’t overcrowd! Read the label for correct spacing.

Maintenance:

Fertilize tasseling corn and other vegetables that are setting—beans, cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes, etc. for increased yield. Plants appreciate this extra boost in food but during our extra-hot weather, be sure to water the plants well first so the fertilizer won't 'burn' the roots.

Lift melons off the soil surface to get them away from moist soil and crawling pests. Boards, cans, or plastic baskets from strawberries or cherry tomatoes serve well. Stop watering plants the week before they're ripe to allow the sweetness to concentrate and to minimize fruit-cracking problems.

Continue to keep vine vegetables (especially beans, cucumbers, squash, and tomatoes) picked, whether or not you will use the harvest that day. If many fruits are allowed to over mature on the plant, production will slow and then cease.

Prune vegetable plants of their leaves that have become ragged from age, disease, or insect attacks. Then water plants well. Healthy new leaves and blossoms will appear, and fruit set will begin again. This is especially effective with beans, cucumbers, and squash.

As vine crops reach the tops of their trellises, pinch off the lead vine. The side shoots will take over the major growth and food production.

If you have kept plants well-picked, but fruit set has stopped, suspect hot weather. Fruit set will begin again about ten to fourteen days after the temperature stays below 85 to 90 degrees.

Toward the end of the month, pinch off the last blossoms of eggplants, peppers, melons, squashes, and tomatoes. Plant energy will then be spent maturing fruit that's already set, instead of setting more fruit that won't ripen sufficiently before fall cold (yes, it's coming!).

Helpful Tips:

Freeze excess vine-ripened tomatoes for winter use. After washing them cut out the core, cut them into quarters, and place on a cookie sheet so the pieces don't touch. Place in freezer. When they're frozen, transfer to bags or containers for use as desired. The peel will slip off easily when the tomato pieces begin to thaw.

Cover sunflower seed heads with cheesecloth when birds start pecking, but also leave a couple heads for the birds. Heads are ready to cure when the backside of the head is brown and dry, with no trace of green. Cut off the seed head, leaving a foot or two of stalk attached. Hang it to cure—still in the cheesecloth—in a well-ventilated, warm location. When the backs are entirely brown and crisp, the seeds should snap out easily!