

December

The days are shorter and the sun's warmth is less, however your garden can thrive in these winter months. If you haven't already, now is the time to sow seeds directly into your garden; carrots, beets, radishes, peas, chard, kale, lettuce, and spinach. To help concentrate daytime warmth and increase germination, cover your seed beds with row covers. A light weight fabric that can be purchased at the local garden stores. It keeps warmth in and pests out. Anchor down the edges with soil or rocks to keep out slugs and others who love the succulent sprouts, and to keep the covers from blowing away.

Plant "starts" purchased from the local nurseries too at this time. Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, brussel sprouts, rhubarb, lettuce, parsley, green onions (be sure to separate before planting).

Harvest leaf crops such as lettuce and spinach by removing only the outer leaves. Let the three or four center leaves develop further. That way, the plant continues growing—and you continue harvesting—throughout the season until spring warmth causes the plant to go to seed.

Protect tender plants from frost. Last year we had a freeze the second week of December. Add row covers to protect seedlings, young transplants will benefit from homemade "greenhouses" made from plastic gallon milk jugs. Cut out the bottom and remove the cap. Place over young plants at night to protect from frost and the rodent problem we are experiencing in the north end of the garden.

When harvesting your vegetables, if you have an abundance, be sure to donate to the community outreach projects by leaving the extra veggies in the garden shed and contacting the outreach committee. The contact info is on the board in the shed. Your donations will be greatly appreciated!

Weeds and nut grass are quickly growing in garden plots at the garden. Even in winter weeds are an ongoing problem. They can spread to your garden neighbor very quickly by the seeds that blow in the wind. Nut grass can spread to your next door neighbor by root systems. Nut grass has a deep root bulb that needs to be removed with a garden tool to dig out and remove completely. Allowing these weeds to grow will become a more severe problem if they are left to spread and take over your plot. Weeds take away valuable nutrients from your soil, compete with your plants for water, and also encourage bug infestations. Please pull and remove all weeds in your plot regularly. The gray weed bin is available to place weeds in.

Never consider the soil in your garden "finished". Add compost and organic matter regularly for good tilth, water retention, and drainage. Think of it as a work-in progress—forever.

Monitor the winter forecast and prepare accordingly your irrigation timer and your watering times. At this time of year watering once per day or every other day for 5-6 minutes is sufficient. Make sure your timer is wrapped and ready for the cold weather. Timers will break if left unprotected in the elements.

Clean up garden debris, and dispose of old plants in the compost bins (not diseased plants—bag and take these home to dispose of, don't compost them). Leaving debris in the garden provides harboring areas for overwintering pests. Periodically rough up the soil surfaces to bring unwanted soil bearing pests and their egg cases to die of exposure on the surface.

Have a wonderful holiday season and an abundance of vegetables this winter!

Romaine calm and carrot on!