

Fall Vegetable Gardening

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Many people consider the end of summer to be the end of gardening season. However, there is a whole other world of vegetables that can be planted in the fall garden in Georgia. Temperatures are milder, and there generally are fewer insects and diseases to contend with when planting in the fall. Cool-season vegetables are ironically planted in the late-summer heat, but thrive as they mature during cooler temperatures as the season progresses. Whether you choose to plant only a cover crop or to try your hand at some cool-season vegetables, planting for the fall growing season will keep your garden productive all year long.

Deciding What You Will Plant

Cool-season vegetables include broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, lettuce, carrots, and assorted greens. Broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts are best started as transplants in the fall garden. Lettuce, carrots, and greens—including mustard greens, turnips, collards, and chard—can be direct-seeded into the garden soil. Consumers can purchase transplants from garden centers in late summer, or they can start their own indoor seed trays 5 to 6 weeks before planting. Be sure to consider both the size of the area you are planting and the number of vegetables you want to produce.

Preparing the Garden Site

When preparing your garden site, the first step is to complete a soil test to ensure the correct nutrients and pH are available in the garden area. The pH should range from 6.2 to 6.8 for fall vegetables to succeed. Soil tests can be done through your [local county Extension office](#). Once you receive the results from the soil sample, you will know what nutrients are needed to help your fall garden grow best.

Till your garden area to a depth of 5 to 6 in. and incorporate organic matter into the soil if available. The initial round of fertilizer also can be added at this time, based on your soil sample recommendations. Plant seeds to the proper depth indicated on their packets and space any transplants appropriately. Larger plants such as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower will need about 1 to 2 ft of distance from each other within a row and 3 ft between each row. The table on page 3 provides information on planting dates, spacing, planting depth, and days to harvest for many common fall vegetable crops.

Newly planted seeds and transplants should be watered immediately to help them get established. Water the area every day for the first week to help seeds germinate and to properly acclimate transplants. Established plants should be watered as needed and provided approximately 1 to 2 in. of irrigation per week. Gardeners must decide which watering practice they wish to use. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation are the most ideal watering methods, as they keep the foliage dry and target the correct area for plant growth. These watering systems also are the most efficient since they only water a small area. Overhead watering wets the foliage, allowing vegetables to become more vulnerable to diseases.

Weed, Disease, and Insect Control

Although there are fewer problems in the fall garden, home gardeners must still keep an eye out for potential issues. Weeds can be controlled by using organic mulches, hand pulling, or weed fabric. Chemical controls also are available but should be used with caution. Plants should be monitored frequently for any signs of insect or disease invasion. Winter insects, such as cabbage loopers, often can go undetected and cause severe damage. Scout the plants carefully by looking between the leaves and under the foliage. Organic options such as *Bt* (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) for insect control often are very effective when applied before damage becomes excessive.

Fall vegetables to plant in Georgia

| Vegetable | When to plant | Method of planting | Spacing between rows (in.) | Spacing within each row (in.) | Seed planting depth (in.) | Days from planting to harvest |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Beets | Aug. 15–Oct. 1 | Seeds | 12–18 | 3–4 | 0.5–0.75 | 60–70 |
| Broccoli | Aug. 15–Oct. 1 | Transplants | 18–30 | 16–20 | | 70–80 |
| Brussels sprouts | Aug. 30–Oct. 1 | Transplants | 10–30 | 16–20 | | 90–100 |
| Cabbage | Aug. 15–Oct. 1 | Transplants | 18–24 | 16–20 | | 75–90 |
| Chinese cabbage | Aug. 30–Oct. 1 | Seeds or transplants | 12–16 | 10–18 | 0.5 | 75–90 |
| Carrots | Aug. 15–Sept. 15 | Seeds | 12–18 | 1–2 | 0.25 | 70–80 |
| Cauliflower | Sept. 1–Oct. 1 | Transplants | 18–24 | 16–20 | | 70–80 |
| Collards | Aug. 15–Oct. 1 | Seeds or transplants | 30–36 | 18–24 | 0.5 | 75–85 |
| Garlic | Sept. 1–Oct. 1 | Bulbs | 12 | 4 | 2 | Early June |
| Kale | Aug. 15–Sept. 30 | Transplants | 24–36 | 18 | 0.25 | 50–65 |
| Kohlrabi | Aug. 15–Sept. 1 | Transplants | 18–24 | 4–6 | | 50–70 |
| Leaf lettuces | Sept. 1– Oct. 15 | Seeds or transplants | 12–18 | 2–3 | 0.25 | 60–70 |
| Leeks | Aug. 15–Sept. 1 | Seeds or transplants | 12–24 | 2–4 | 0.5 | Late spring |
| Mustard | Aug. 15–Sept. 30 | Seeds | 12–18 | 2–3 | 0.5 | 40–50 |
| Onions | Sept. 1–Oct. 1 | Seed, sets, or transplants | 12–18 | 4 | 0.25 | Late spring |
| Radishes | Aug. 15–Oct. 15 | Seeds | 8–12 | 0.75–1 | 0.5 | 20–40 |
| Rutabaga | Aug. 15–Sept. 30 | Seeds | 24–36 | 3–4 | 0.5 | 80–90 |
| Spinach | Aug. 15–Sept. 30 | Seeds | 8–12 | 1–2 | 0.5 | 50–60 |
| Swiss chard | Aug. 15–Sept. 1 | Seeds | 24–30 | 2–3 | 0.5 | 50–60 |

Cover Crops

Even if you decide not to plant a fall garden, it is a good practice to establish a cover crop (Figure 1). Cover crops help hold the soil and prevent erosion while adding rich organic matter when they are tilled under in the spring. Cover crops can include a combination of a cereal grain, such as wheat, rye, or oats, with a legume plant, such as clover or winter peas. Cover crops can be planted in late summer to early fall by direct seeding. This is a great organic practice to help build the soil in areas of the garden that are left idle. Be sure not to wait too long to plant your cover crop, as a late planting can often reduce its growth significantly during the winter months.



Figure 1. Cover crops, such as the red clover shown in the center of this photo, help to prevent erosion and add valuable nutrients and organic matter to the soil once they are tilled in.

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