KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Cool Weather Veggies”

August 27, 2019

Tomatoes! Cucumbers! Corn off the stalk and into boiling water! Summer is at its finest when we can harvest sun-kissed vegetables. Yum!

But once nighttime temperatures drop and the harvest is over, must the vegetable garden sit barren, waiting for next Spring? Absolutely not! We can start again, planting the same cool season vegetables we grew in April. With good planning, some season extenders and quick reflexes, we can have radishes, beets, lettuce, spinach, peas, kale and broccoli harvested before the ground freezes solid.

These vegetables can not only withstand cold temperatures, they often need them to germinate, grow, set fruit and mature. Some winter-hardy vegetables, which are the toughest of the cool-seasons, such as kale or Brussels sprouts, even benefit from a light frost, as it converts the starches into sugar and improves the taste.

While some cool-season vegetables can grow in hot weather, their quality if often inferior. Lettuce may bolt and taste bitter when grown in the heat of summer but flourishes in the closing days of summer with a little frost protection. We like radishes grown in cooler weather since they turn fibrous, unpleasantly sharp and pungent in hot summer weather. And garlic loves being planted in the Fall and not harvested until Spring.

Our cool summer nights can work to the benefit of growing some crops. Broccoli, for example, germinates when the air temperature is 70-80° but grows best with cool (50-60°) nights. It’s almost perfect for our late August conditions. In contrast, tomatoes prefer night temperatures in the 60s, which is not always possible in Central Oregon, even in August which is why we use season extenders for many warm season crops.

Mulch is a very effective season extender in the early days of fall to keep the soil temperatures above freezing. A few inches of straw will insulate the plant roots from the first fall frosts. Straw bale cold frames, built right in the vegetable garden can protect your crops if you put a ‘lid’ of Plexiglas or an old window across the top on cold nights.

Cool-season crops have root systems that are generally shallower than warm-season ones. This means that cool-season plants may need to be watered and fertilized more often. These plants have limited access to water because the root zone is small.

As with warm-season crops, the maturity date on the seed packet or plant tag will give you the information to help you decide if the vegetable will reach harvest before the winter arrives. Before sowing these second crops, turn over the soil and mix in some balanced fertilizer to replace what earlier plants have used up.

Harvest young plants before ground freezes. You can harvest leafy vegetables, such as Swiss chard, kale and mustard greens before the leaves reach full size. These small leaves are more tender and tastier than mature ones. Plant these crops in succession every few weeks over the course of the summer to provide a steady supply of young leaves.

If it is too late to plant a second crop of vegetables, you may want to plant a cover crop or "[green manure](https://extension.umn.edu/node/9006)". Once you harvest your vegetables, sow the cover crop seeds thickly to keep the garden weed-free, prevent soil erosion and add organic matter to the soil. Turn in the dead plant material after a killing frost in late fall.

Green manures include clover, and peas, annual ryegrass, oats and buckwheat.

For more information in this and many other gardening topics, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or visit our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

<https://extension.psu.edu/cool-season-vs-warm-season-vegetables>

Planting & Transplanting Chart: <https://extension.psu.edu/vegetable-planting-and-transplanting-guide>

Planting Vegetables in Mid-Summer for Fall Harvest: <https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/planting-vegetables-midsummer-fall-harvest>