

September 2009

## Vegetable and Herb Gardening Tips

### Culture

- Plant cool season vegetable crops now that will mature into the later fall months. These include Chinese cabbage, turnips, kale, mustard, spinach, lettuce, carrots, and beets. Keep seedlings and transplants well watered and mulched. Spinach and lettuce seeds may germinate poorly in warm soils and should be sown heavily to compensate. When planting fall vegetables, be aware that more time will be required to bring the crop to maturity because of reduced light and ambient temperatures. Add at least 2 weeks to the “days to maturity” number on your seed packets. Plan to cover your fall garden crops in September with a floating row cover or cold frame to further extend the harvest period. Be sure to fertilize seedbeds, keep the soil moist and protect seedlings from pests.
- Consider building a cold frame or using floating row covers to extend your fall harvest.
- Cover crops of oats, winter rye, winter wheat and crimson clover can be sown now through the middle of October. Seeds should be in close contact with soil to promote germination. Your cover crop will protect your soil, conserve soil nutrients and add organic matter and nutrients when tilled in next spring. You can also sow your cover crop in walkways between beds.
- Plant garlic now through the end of October for a July 4 harvest. Select the largest cloves from the largest heads. Plant the cloves root end down; space them 4-6 inches apart and cover with 1-2 inches of soil. Mulch the garlic bed with fallen tree leaves after the green leaves emerge. Do not use store bought garlic for planting because of the significant risk of introducing white rot, a devastating fungal disease.
- If your winter squashes and pumpkins are full-sized, fully colored and the rind is hardened, cut them from the vine leaving a 4-5 inch handle and store in a cool location until ready to use. Gourds should be harvested after a hard frost.
- Dig storage potatoes on a cloudy, warm day after plants begin to die back. Let them lay on the ground for a few hours before bringing them inside. They should not be washed, washing increases the chance of rot in storage. Store potatoes in a dark, cool location (35° - 40°F.) Sweet potatoes should be harvested the same way except that it helps to “cure” the roots for 10-14 days in a warm, dark location (85° F.). Curing helps to heal over cuts and scrapes before being stored for the winter in a cool, dry location (55° F.)
- Sunflowers can be harvested when the backs of the flowers are dry. Cut the stalks one foot below the flower head, tie them together and hang upside down in a cool dry place.
- Cooler temperatures and shorter days will cause tomatoes and other warm season crops to ripen unevenly and be less flavorful. You may also notice seeds inside of tomato fruits beginning to germinate. This is a natural phenomenon and will not affect eating quality. Full size green tomatoes can be brought indoors to ripen. They ripen more quickly if placed in a paper bag with a banana or apple. The ethylene gas released from the banana or apple will help to ripen the tomatoes.

### Insects

- Cabbage loopers, imported cabbageworms, cross-striped caterpillar, harlequin bugs, cabbage aphids, and cabbage flea beetles are feeding on members of the cabbage family. They can be handpicked or sprayed with B.t.(for the loopers, worms and carterpillars) or try covering crops right after they are planted with a floating row cover.

Educating People To Help Themselves

Local Governments - U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

## **Herbs**

- Now is a good time to propagate herbs by stem cuttings. Cut six-inch stem pieces and remove all but the top leaves. Dip the lower ends in rooting hormone and insert the stems into a moist and loose, soil-less media. Cover the pot with a perforated plastic bag and keep outside in a protected location. Pull gently on the stems in two weeks to test for root growth. Pot the cuttings up individually after they start growing and bring them indoors for use during the winter.
- Harvest the individual leaves of tarragon, rosemary, basil, sage and other culinary herbs and dry them indoors. Herb leaves are most intensely flavored right before the plant blooms. Snip foliage in the morning after the dew has dried. To dry down herbs for storage, tie the cut stems together and hang them upside down in a dry location. Cover with a paper bag to avoid losing the shattered leaves. Store dried herbs in glass jars away from light and heat. Fresh basil can be processed into pesto or frozen in plastic containers for winter use.

**Have a pest or gardening question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center**

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