

For Cool Season Veggies – Timing Is Everything

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Now that summer has finally arrived, your tomatoes may finally be ripening and your peppers getting hot! This spring, it was a tough sell to convince some local gardeners that their warm season veggies would ever start to grow and produce. But you can't fight Mother Nature, so we just had to be patient and wait for the 100 degree days.

Just like summer crops are affected by the weather, so are winter and cool season crops. For novice gardeners, the idea of winter crops is a bit intimidating; they aren't sure when they should plant or when they can expect a harvest. The good news is that Master Gardeners have lots of help available to help you plan the timing of both your planting and picking right on schedule. Of course, that's barring any totally unusual weather, like we had this spring!

So what's the difference between summer and winter veggies? Summer veggies tend to be those that produce a fruit or "seed pod" that we eat. Some examples are tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, beans or squash. The vegetables that grow successfully in cooler weather tend to be ones for which we eat the leaves (lettuce, Swiss chard, spinach, and cabbage), the buds (broccoli and cauliflower), or the roots or bulbs (carrots, radishes, turnips, garlic, etc.).

Anyone who has tried to grow broccoli in the summer knows that the hot weather makes it inedible because it bolts, which means it flowers in preparation for producing seeds. That is also true for most of the other cool weather crops. Once people experience this, they may think it's best to wait for the cool weather of October or November to plant. It may be surprising, but actually, to get off to a strong and vigorous start, most cool season plants, whether grown from seed or from a transplant, need to be planted while the days are still long and the soil is still warm. This means planting at a time that the starts will require consistent and frequent watering and possibly, depending on your location, some protection from the sun's rays in the hottest part of the day.

So how do you learn when to plant cool season crops? The best resource in town is the ***Foothill Vegetable Planting Guide***, a publication of the UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardeners. This illustrated laminated guide is one of our best sellers, but it is a bargain at only \$5.00. Based on the Placerville elevation of 1800', it lists a wide range of vegetables, with the best months for planting each from seed, transplanting starts, maximum harvest, and harvest range. It also gives you guidelines for how to modify the dates for the other locations/elevations throughout the West Slope. This handy tool is available at our office (see details at the end of the article), our free public education classes and during the summer at our Master Gardener booth at the various farmers' markets throughout the county.

A look at the **Summer/Fall** side of the guide tells us that early August is the time to sow seeds for cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and mid-August is the time to get the transplants of those veggies in the ground, as well as to sow lettuce from seed. Not much is planted in September, but by October, it will be time to plant such tasty garden additions as garlic, onions,

and peas. Peas are an exception to the rule about the difference between warm and cool season veggies; even though we eat the pods, they don't like hot weather and will wither to a crisp rather than produce more peas in heat.

You will also notice if you turn the guide over to the **Winter/Spring** side that you'll have another opportunity to plant some of these same vegetables again in January and February. Do remember that depending on your elevation, exposure to the sun, and the microclimate in your vegetable garden, you may find these plantings are a bit more unpredictable and the interval between planting and harvest will generally be longer than for fall plantings. In addition, mid-winter plantings can often present a challenge because soil is too wet to be cultivated. Some gardeners prepare their winter beds ahead of the rainy season to avoid this problem.

Want to know more about cool season crops? Don't miss our free *Fall and Winter Vegetable* class tomorrow, August 7th, featuring our own Zack Dowell. Not only is Zack a wonderful backyard veggie grower, he is also a fantastic instructor. In fact, Zack is so good that rather than bring in a UC expert, like those who teach most of the internal training classes for our new Master Gardeners, the organizers ask Zack to give the vegetable gardening training. You will learn so much from him that you will leave the class bursting with enthusiasm for what you can grow over the fall and winter. The class starts at 9 a.m. and will be held in the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville.

So whether you purchase a *Foothill Veggie Planting Guide*, or come to the class on the 7th, (We recommend you do BOTH!) you will be ready to grow veggies all year round.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener/.