

Growing Late Season Crops

During the hottest days of summer, my preoccupation with gardening diminishes dramatically and my free time is more likely spent swimming in our friends' pond. Luckily, I've planned ahead for this period of rest by mulching my vegetable garden with paper and straw and my flower beds with cedar mulch. Mulching allows me to water less often and keeps my beds essentially weed free.

Fortunately, I am able to break out of this July laziness just long enough to sow seeds for many wonderful late season crops, many of which perform and taste better when grown for a fall harvest. Many vegetables prefer the cooler growing conditions and lower light levels that occur in late summer. Additionally, many of the insects that plague our crops throughout spring and early summer have disappeared.

The real fast growers (like lettuce, chard, salad greens, and radishes) can be planted more or less continuously throughout the growing season. Lettuce and greens actually fare better when planted later in the season because the flea beetles and other small chewing insects are gone. Spinach needs at least six weeks of cool weather from seeding to harvest and can be planted about four weeks before the average first Fall frost. You'll often find the remnants of your Fall spinach crop shooting up new leaves the following spring having survived the sub-zero winter temperatures! Some crops including parsnips and leeks can be overwintered in the ground by applying a thick (12 - 18 inches) layer of organic mulch to prevent the ground from thawing during a midwinter warm spell and then re-freezing.

The average first frost date in our area is around September 15th, although we typically don't get a hard killing frost until late September or mid-October. A light frost actually improves the flavor of brussels sprouts, parsnips and collard greens making them sweeter. Between mid-July and mid-August, you can plant a wide variety of veggies that will provide you with a bountiful Fall harvest.

Beets prefer cool, moist weather and are ready for harvest in just 45-65 days depending on the variety that you plant. You can plant early, faster maturing varieties of cabbage and cauliflower in midsummer from started seedlings for a better yield. A second planting of peas and beans can be sown in midsummer, but these tender plants will not tolerate frost. You can extend their harvest for a short while by covering them at night to protect them from cool nighttime temps.

So, while you're enjoying your tomatoes, peppers and other fruits of your spring-planted crops, don't forget to sow seeds for a great fall crop. You'll be so glad you did!

For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:



**40 River Street, Troy, NY 12180
518.274.8685 CDCG@juno.com
www.cdcg.org**