**Fall Vegetables**

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Some gardeners in San Antonio think it is easier to grow vegetables in the fall and winter than the spring.

Prepare your raised bed for a fall vegetable by adding 2 inches of compost and incorporating it into the soil along with 1 cup of slow release lawn fertilizer for every 50 square feet of garden.

You can water the garden with a hose and wand but drip irrigation is the easiest and best way to water the vegetables. If you have drip irrigation however, it is also useful to have access to a hose and wand.

Tomatoes are the favorite vegetables for both the spring and the fall. The goal in the fall is to get the tomato transplant in place as early as possible so your crop is produced and harvested before cold weather arrives.

If you don’t have your tomatoes in yet, find some large plants at your favorite nursery and get them planted. The recommended varieties are Tycoon, Tigress, BHN 968 (cherry), Solar Fire, 444, BHN 602 and Phoenix. The fastest producing heat-setters, Surefire, may also be on the market.

Tomatoes need to grow in full sun. Plant them 3 feet apart and place a tomato cage around each plant.

Mulch the tomatoes with leaves. My favorite mulch for the vegetable garden is live oak leaves. They are easy to spread and hold up to traffic.

Green beans, summer squash, carrots, sweet corn, radishes, lettuce, beets, rutabagas, turnips, mustard, collards and chard can all be planted by seed. Follow the seed packet instructions concerning planting depth.

When comparing variety choices, a general recommendation is to select the variety with the shortest time between planting and harvest.

Green bean, corn and summer squash are cold sensitive so it is especially important that you select the varieties that mature a crop quickly.

For green beans, for example, you would use bush beans rather than the vining selections because they produce faster.

It is especially important that lettuce seed not be buried. Rake a 12-inch row, smooth and spread the seed on the whole surface of the row. Water the seed in and irrigate each day until it reaches 1 inch tall with a gentle spray from a wand.

I have also had good luck with carrots planted with the 12 inch on the surface lettuce method.

The stars of the fall vegetable garden are the Cole crops: broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.

They can be planted by seed now but it works best when they are planted as transplants late in September or in October.

Broccoli will produce large heads in November or December and then produce smaller heads into early spring.

Cabbage is relatively fast to mature heads as well but they can be left in the garden through much of the winter until you can use them.

Cauliflower is usually slower to produce its heads. They can be harvested in December and January. Keep cauliflower head white by pinning the leaves over the heads with clothes pins. The sun turns the heads yellow. They taste just as good and are probably more nutritional but most of us like a white cauliflower to eat.

Brussels sprouts are the slowest to produce, but provide the miniature cabbage over a long period from winter into the spring.

The major pest on the Cole crops is cabbage looper. The voracious caterpillars eat big holes in the foliage. Be ready with Bt or Spinosad at first sign of the caterpillars feeding.

**Garden tasks**

Apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze to prevent grassy winter weeds. A product such as Portrait will prevent broadleaf weeds such as thistles, beggar’s lice, bedstraw and dandelions.

Give your roses a light pruning to remove dead wood and prepare them for the fall flush of bloom. For the hybrid tea roses you will need to resume your weekly insect and disease sprays. Provide all roses with a cup of lawn fertilizer spread over the root system.

If you prune or if there is breakage on live or red oaks, paint the wound to prevent oak wilt.

Lower and clean out your martin houses. If you lower the house and block the entrances, it eliminates wintering homes for English sparrows.