

Gardening in Douglas County for the autumn

September and October in western Oregon is usually still very warm, with daytime high temperatures often in the 70s or 80s, while much of the country experiences their first frost or freeze and the gardening season comes to an end. This lovely fall regional weather condition for Douglas County and parts of the Willamette Valley is caused by the moderating effect of the Pacific Ocean that keeps us warm in the fall and mild in winter.

Understanding this climatic feature should encourage you to extend the gardening season into fall and – with a hoop house – even into winter. Learning these nuances of temperature and climate in our coastal region can make you a better gardener by putting you in touch with our seasonal norms.

Western Oregon is an excellent place to grow fall and winter vegetables that tolerate cool temperatures with some short periods of freezing weather. These plants include garlic, onions, peas, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, kale, collards and leeks.

If your garden is an in-ground plot and you start plants from seed, you will need to plant in August when the soil is still warm to get plants up and established before the cool of winter. Once established, plants grow slowly during fall but can be productive if you have chosen a garden site that has good air drainage to prevent an early hard frost or freeze.

If you have raised beds or a well-drained garden plot, you can transplant starts into the beds in late August or September and, depending on the plants, they can be harvested in the fall or overwinter until spring. Vegetables with short growing seasons and tolerance to cool evenings like lettuce, bunching onions, kale, collards and carrots can all do well.

To be very successful in winter gardening with a wider selection of crops, put up plastic hoop covers over your garden or raised beds to keep the rain off, and the cover will provide a few



Steve Renquist
Extension Spotlight

extra degrees of warmth to the soil promoting additional growth. Climatically the most limiting factor of winter gardening in our area is excess rainfall, not cold temperatures.

In our maritime climate, soil temperature is the real key to when you should plant your fall season garden. With our hot dry summers, soil is still very warm into September. However, as the days get shorter going into fall and the first rains arrive, soil temperature will fall rapidly, making seed germination more difficult. That is why it is important to only plant cool season crops in August or early September with more tolerance of cool wet conditions and use transplants if possible to get a faster start.

To garden more effectively in fall use raised beds. Raised beds have better drainage than in-ground gardens, they dry out faster and stay warm longer into the fall. If you have an in-ground garden and your site is well drained you may be able to grow cool season crops through the winter, but without a hoop house or cold frame be prepared for a few problems.

When you transition from your summer garden to a fall garden and you are preparing the soil, make sure you add additional compost or nutrients to off-set the soil nutrients removed by your summer harvest. If you are not going to plant a fall or winter garden it is important to add compost and plant a cover crop on your garden plot in September when the soil is still warm and the cover crop can get a good start to protect your soil over winter.

Steve Renquist is the Horticulture Extension Agent for OSU Extension Service of Douglas County. Steve can be reached by email steve.renquist@oregonstate.edu or phone at 541-672-4461.