

PLANNING AND PLANTING FOR A YEAR AROUND HARVEST

PRESENTATION KEY POINTS

Portland Area Climate

The Portland area climate can be described as Mediterranean or maybe more accurately, West Coast Marine. The moderate Marine climate is carried to the Portland area by the prevailing westerly winds. These sea breezes keep the region from having extremes of hot and cold weather or dramatic short term temperature swings. Portland is in USDA zone 8 with an average winter minimum temperature of 10-20F. Many vegetable plants can survive these temperatures. Their survival is also enhanced by the fact that the change in temperature is usually gradual which allows the plants time to adapt. Most of the U.S. away from the West Coast has a continental climate that is characterized by hot summers and cold winters that often have dramatic temperature swings over a short period of time. Without time to adapt many plants can be killed by a sudden cold snap. The unique climate of the U.S. West Coast creates an excellent area for year-around vegetable gardening without the need for green houses or other forms of protection. Like a true Mediterranean climate, the Portland area has a “wet season” from Oct. to May and a “dry season” of June through Sept. Because the dry season coincides with the primary growing season summer irrigation is a must.

Taking full advantage of our climate

To take full advantage of our climate requires planting crops 9 months out of the year. The outdoor planting season starts in early Feb. and ends in Oct. The chart on the back of the planting calendar handout has an example of a single planting/ harvesting scheme (std. bed) common in regions with a continental climate and a double planting/harvesting scheme (year-around) that can be used in the Portland area. This is a way of doubling the harvest from a single bed and keeping it in production for 10 months out of the year. This is only one simple example of gardening over a long season. The last chart on the workshop handout shows 5 years of production on one bed. It shows examples of overwintering crops, kale/beets/cabbage, and double cropping, lettuce/kale, along with examples of crop rotation. The planting calendar and charts like this are the essence of year-around gardening. Because the Portland area has many micro-climates use the planting calendar as a guide.

Summer Planting to Harvest for the Next 9 Months

The prime planting season for a year-around harvest is summer. Specifically, the months of June, July, and August. Seeds sown during these months will provide a harvest that starts in Sept. and extends into June of the following year. Succession planting, planting the same crop over period of time to extend the harvest, is common but what about succession harvesting? Planting many crops with different days to maturity on the same day to extend the harvest is easy to do in the summer. The 5-year planting chart shows some examples. Broccoli sown in July is harvested from mid-Sept. to the end of Nov. Cabbage sown in July is harvested from Nov. into April of the following year. Beets sown in July are harvested from Sept. into March then what is left in the ground will sprout and produce beet greens to harvest into June. A combination of early planting of cold tolerant plants and overwintering summer sown plants can provide fresh produce during the late winter and early spring when most home gardens are fallow. The table below shows the two cool seasons and one warm season in our climate.

| Cool Season 1 | | | | | | Cool Season 2 | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-----|------|---------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June | ---- | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

Warm season

| | | | | |
|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| May | June | July | Aug | Sept |
|-----|------|------|-----|------|

Timing the Planting

One of the keys to having a successful fall and winter harvest is planting at the correct time. The goal is to have the summer planted crops just mature as the weather is cooling off and the days are shorter in mid-Oct. Use the “days to maturity” on the seed package and count back from Oct. 1 to get the approximate planting date.

Spring sown seeds always take longer than the stated maturity days because they grow slowly in cool spring soil. The same seed sown in July will mature on time because the soil is warm and the days are long. Two timing examples; potatoes and kale. Yukon Gold potatoes planted in April will mature by late July. These can be eaten for the next few months but will be sprouting by Dec. Planted in early July they will mature in early Oct. and store in a cool basement for at least 5 months. April planted kale will mature in July and can be harvested during the summer. However, by Oct. this plant will be over mature, likely infested with aphids and chewed up by cabbage butterfly larva, and may not survive the winter. August planted kale matures in Oct. and because the plant is young and healthy it’s much more likely to survive severe winter weather. Learning the correct timing will require a few years of practice in your garden’s microclimate.

Summer Planting Techniques

Starting seeds and raising transplants can be challenging during the hot, dry weather of July and August. When direct seeding or using transplants plant in a deep furrow where the soil will stay moist. Covering seeds with potting soil will reduce crusting that can lower germination success. Covering the seeded furrow with 50% shade cloth will keep the soil cool and moist during germination. Transplants and seedlings need protection from pests that are abundant in mid-summer. Tender transplants and seedlings can quickly disappear when birds or insects descend upon your garden. Using summer weight floating row covers will eliminate damage from these pests. Cover your transplants as soon as they are set out or as soon as the shade cloth is removed from seed beds. The covers can stay on until the plants out grow them. These row covers are the number one way of eliminating the need for using pesticides in your garden and are the key to having small plants survive and thrive.

Tending and Harvesting

You can reduce the need for frequent watering and weeding of small plants by planting in a deep furrow and mulching with compost or straw. The mulch will help keep the soil moist and suppress the germination of annual weeds. Once the row covers are removed insects can attack your plants. However, the larger plants are less attractive to the pests and are able to sustain some damage without a significant reduction in harvest. Harvesting in fall and winter is a leisurely process compared to the summer. Plants grow slowly and can hold in the garden for months. Things like broccoli that would bolt in a week in the summer heat can hold for a month in Oct. to allow for an extended harvest. Once the fall rains start your garden “work” consists of walking out back and picking dinner. In essence your garden is one big refrigerator from Nov. through March.

Winter Protection

Most of the vegetables planted in the summer for fall and winter harvest will do fine without any form of protection from the elements. If you want to have higher quality greens into the winter, you can cover them from the rain. The cold doesn’t usually kill them but the incessant rain can cause them to rot. A plastic cover or cold frame with open ends for ventilation will extend the season for at least a month. Root crops stored in the ground will freeze and be lost if the ground freezes. A 3” layer of mulch or straw will insulate the ground and keep it from freezing. If extreme cold is predicted, you can harvest as much as possible and store it in the refrigerator where it should keep for a month or more.