THE FALL VEGETABLE GARDEN

This is a great time of year in the vegetable garden. Cooler night temperatures allow tomato and pepper plants to regroup and set another flush of fruit. Meanwhile, it’s time to start planting crops for fall and winter harvest. Fall crops include most cool-season vegetables like beets, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, lettuce, onions, radishes, spinach and turnips. Many of these vegetables actually taste better when grown in the fall rather than the spring.

There are several factors that determine when you should plant your fall crop. First, you will need to know the average date of the first killing frost for your area. In Onslow County, this is generally considered to be the first week in November. This means that about half of the time, the first frost occurs before this date, half the time it occurs after.

Second, look at your seed packet to determine the “days to maturity” for your particular variety. Count backwards from the frost date using the number of days to maturity to determine the latest planting date. Generally, longer maturing vegetables will need to be planted earlier in the season, while quick maturing vegetables can be planted later.

The type of crop you are growing will make a difference. Tender vegetables like cucumbers need to be planted earlier because they will be killed by the first frost. You will want to plant them several weeks earlier to get a decent harvest in before they are killed. Hardier vegetable like kale and collards can be planted later because they will continue producing after the first frost and up until freezing temperatures set in.

To extend the harvest season, schedule your plantings so you have successive harvests. There are two ways to do this. You can plant early, mid and late season varieties of a single crop on the same day. Each variety will come in to harvest at slightly different times in the season. Alternatively, make several smaller successive plantings of the same variety 10-14 days apart. This will result in a staggered harvest interval for the produce.

In Onslow County, we have lots of opportunities for late summer and fall planting. It’s too late for this season, but next year consider planting bush
beans, pole lima beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, carrots and rutabagas in mid-to late-July. You can plant a second crop of tender warm season crops like tomatoes and cucumbers in early August. Cool season crops like collards, cauliflower, broccoli, turnips, radish, kale, kohlrabi, and rutabagas can be planted in late August or early September. Later in September, you still have time for onions, radishes and second plantings of short season hardy crops like leaf lettuce and spinach.

Insects and diseases are often more of a challenge in the fall garden. Make sure you are scouting and controlling insect pests throughout the spring and summer seasons for a successful fall garden. Also, remove any dead or diseased plant material prior to planting a fall crop.

You can extend the season of tender vegetables by protecting them through the first frost. We often have several weeks of good growing conditions after the first frost. Cover the rows or plants with burlap, floating row covers or even an old bed sheet. Support the covering on stakes or wire to keep it up off of the plants. Semi-hardy and hardy vegetables will require little or no frost protection. Semi-hardy vegetables like beets and cauliflower should be harvested before a heavy freeze. Well-mulched root crops and hardy leafy greens like spinach and collards can be harvested well into the winter. With a little bit of planning, you can be harvesting something out of your garden almost year round in Onslow County.

Check out the NCSU publication “Planning a Fall Vegetable Garden” for more detailed information including suggested cultivars and planting dates. This publication is available at the Cooperative Extension Office or find it online here: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001.html

Start Planning for Next Year Now

If you didn’t sample your soil this spring, sample now for next year. By sampling this fall, you will avoid the long turn around time that we experience when we send off soil samples in the late winter or early spring. Also, taking samples now will give you time to improve your soil before the next growing season. If you need to adjust the pH of the soil, you will want to apply lime or sulfur this fall because it takes time for these chemicals to react in the soil and start to change pH.

EVENTS AND REMINDERS

Beekeeping Shortcourse

September 17th (8:00 am - 5:00 pm) and 24th (8:00 am - noon) at the Onslow County Multipurpose Complex.

This two day class is ideal for the beginning beekeeper or anyone interested in taking up beekeeping. It will provide a solid introduction to the science of beekeeping. September 17th, students will cover the basics of bee management, bee biology, equipment and products of the hive, seasonal management, bee diseases and pests. September 24th, students will take a written and practical exam.

Cost for the course is $15 and includes the textbook “First Lessons in Beekeeping”. To preregister, please contact the Onslow County Beekeepers Association:
* Jeff Morton (call 910.330.5732 or email jkmorton@ncsu.edu)
* Julie Taylor (call 910.787.2577 or email poptart1021@yahoo.com)

Gardening Classes

I will be offering several gardening classes in September, each will be offered at one of the Onslow County Public Library locations or on base. These classes are free and open to the public.

Planning for Perennials

Learn about plant selection, site preparation and best planting practices for perennial plants. We will discuss tips and tricks for low maintenance landscaping and plants that will give you years of enjoyment.

September 10 - Richlands Branch Library, 10:00 am
September 24 - Swansboro Branch Library, 10:00 am
Gardening in Problem Areas
Learn how to garden in less than perfect locations. In this two hour class, we will discuss plant selection, site preparation and management practices that will help us garden successfully in difficult areas. We will cover plants and practices for sites that have environmental challenges (too dry, wet, salty or shady) and deer problems.

September 10 - Jacksonville Main Library, 1:00 pm

Fall Gardening Tasks
We’ll discuss fall tasks to prepare your garden for winter and ensure success in the spring.

September 28 - Camp Johnson Library, Noon. Please call 910.450.0844 to register.

With hurricane season upon us, we may be going from drought to deluge. Check out this article from Susan Brown, Horticulture Extension Agent, in Brunswick County.

The Reason for Rain Gardens
Plant selection and bed preparation enables rain gardens to tolerate periods when the soil is saturated as well as periods of dryness. A rain garden differs from other gardens in the amount of time it can remain flooded and still thrive. As gardeners in the South well know, when it comes to rainfall, it’s feast or famine. These extremes can make gardens a constant challenge, but also makes our region a perfect environment for rain gardens.

A rain garden is designed to capture rainfall flowing through your yard, store that water to nurture its plants, and cleanse runoff by removing pollutants that it carries from various sources. Pet waste, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides from lawns, gasoline and oil from vehicles, and heavy metals are all found in stormwater runoff. In a rain garden, pollutants can be absorbed by plant roots and either held in the plant or used by the plant for growth.

Rain gardens are fairly easy and inexpensive to create. They have a defined structure made up of five basic components. First observe your yard during a rainfall event. Determine where water begins flowing and where it is going. Rain gardens should ideally be placed between the source of runoff (roofs, driveways) and the runoff destination (drains, streams, low spots); a natural depression in the landscape works well. The garden should be at least ten feet away from the foundation of your home. It should be 25’ away from a septic drain field. The best location for the garden will be in partial to full sun.

Rain gardens work best in well-drained soils, but they can also be installed on sites with components of clay. Pick a few places and dig a two ft. deep hole, fill the hole with water a few times. Time how long it takes for the test pit to drain. A quick draining garden will drain in 12 hours. A standard rain garden will drain in 12-72 hours. A wetland garden will drain in 3 days.

The next step is to determine the size of the rain garden. A depression is created, either by berming a sloped area or by digging down three to six inches and piling soil around the edges of the garden. The garden does not need to be excessively deep, only deep enough to capture a significant amount of water.

The fourth step is to rototill the bottom of the basin, working in an inch or two of compost. Organic matter increases the soil’s ability to absorb and drain water and is vital to soil health and its ability to support plant growth.

Lastly, select drought tolerant or wet-tolerant plants based on how your soil drains, so you are working with nature instead of against it. Tuck the plants in 3” of hardwood mulch and irrigate during long prolonged dry weather through the first growing season.

All the water our planet will ever have is already here in some form. It is a finite resource, and gardeners everywhere can play an important role in protecting it.

In The Lawn
Summer annual weeds are maturing now. At this point, they are very difficult to control. The recommendation is to wait and control them with a preemergent herbicide applied in late February if
necessary. Annual bluegrass is a winter annual that is best controlled with a preemergent control applied in September. October and November are the ideal months to control of Florida betony with post emergent herbicides, if this weed is a problem in your yard.

If you choose to use a ‘winterizing’ fertilizer, make sure it doesn’t contain nitrogen. Winterizing fertilizers are used to add potassium to the soil (make sure your soil test indicates a need for potassium before application). Nitrogen will stimulate lush growth in warm season grasses that should be going dormant for this winter. Application of nitrogen in the fall promotes winter kill and disease problems in warm season turf.

**Large patch** resumes active growth in the fall following heavy rains. If you had problems with large patch this spring, you may consider the use of a fungicide such as Immunex, Immunox, Bayleton or Heritage. However, long term control will require improved management practices. Avoid excessive thatch build up (no more than \( \frac{1}{2} \)”), avoid excessive nitrogen fertilizer (on centipede no more than \( \frac{1}{2} \) pound N per year per 1000 square feet), maintain optimum soil pH (5.5 to 5.7 for centipede) and mow to proper height (1 ½” for centipede). Turf usually recovers in warm dry weather. If the dead spot has some living sprigs scattered in it, it may reestablish on its own. If the spot is bare, consider re-seeding, sprigging or sodding as appropriate in the spring.

Rings of mushrooms may crop up after rain in the fall. These rings are referred to as “fairy rings”. Generally fairy rings only pose an aesthetic issue in home lawns. Frequent moving will remove the mushrooms. Over time, the fungus in the soil may make the soil resistant to water infiltration. If grass starts to brown around the ring, frequent regular aeration (with a plug aerator or the tines of a pitch fork) will help promote water infiltration, soil rewetting and grass survival.

**Fire ants** have kept a pretty low profile this summer with the combination of high heat and drought. They moved their colonies deeper underground and surface mounds have been few and far between. This can change quickly when fall rains set in. Heavy rains will drive up them up and

surface mounds will crop up quickly. If you have already treated your lawn with a bait product, remember that it may take up to two weeks from ant emergence until you see control.


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**Spiders Are a Gardener's Best Friend!**
Charlotte Glen – Horticulture Agent, Pender County Cooperative Extension

(Like all spiders, the large black and yellow argiope, also known as the garden spider, is an important predator of many types of insect pests.)

Maybe it is because my name is Charlotte and I grew up on a farm, but I have always had an affinity for spiders. I realize not everyone shares this attraction, but here is some news that may help you tolerate them. Research has confirmed that spiders are the most important and abundant predator of insect pests in most yards. This means they are not hanging around just to frighten you. In fact, they are actively defending your yard and garden against a multitude of insect pests.

**Understanding Spiders**
Spiders eat many types of nuisance and plant damaging insects, including mosquitoes, stink bugs, caterpillars, aphids, and beetles. Actually they will eat just about any insect they can get their fangs on, including other beneficials, though on the whole they eat a lot more bad bugs than good ones. In turn, spiders are an important food source for many species of birds, serving as both predator and prey in the food web.

Spiders are common in gardens and landscapes in our area throughout the year, though their numbers are generally highest in late summer and fall. An over abundance of spiders in your yard or home is an indication that there are plenty of insects around for them to eat. If you have a lot of spiders around and you can tolerate them, the best thing you can do is leave them alone to allow them to naturally
reduce the insect population.

Hunters
While all spiders have the ability to spin silk, not all of them form webs. Some of them hunt. The large brown wolf spider is a common hunter in our area, and can be found actively seeking prey both indoors and out. Also common are the much smaller jumping spiders, which as their name indicates, leap onto their prey and can move at amazing speeds. One of my favorite hunting spiders is the green lynx. This beautiful bright green spider often hangs out in flowers waiting for an unsuspecting meal to come their way.

Web Weavers
Web weaving spiders catch many types of flying insects in their sticky webs. The most well known of these industrious garden defenders are the orb weavers, whose large, symmetrical webs can truly be considered works of art. These include the large black and yellow garden spiders that are common throughout our area in summer and fall, as well as the magnificent golden silk orb weaver. Also known as the banana spider, this talented spider can weave enormous webs, but is limited to areas just along the coast. Incidentally, Charlotte from Charlotte’s Web, was a barn orb weaver, a species of spider native to the northeastern US and not found in our area.

A Word of Caution
Most spiders will bite if handled or when defending their egg sac. Most of the time these bites only result in a small welt that is much less painful than a bee or wasp sting and there is little to be concerned about. There are two spiders found in our area though that can be more serious – the black widow and the brown recluse.

Of the two, black widows are much more common and easily recognized, typically having a large bulbous shiny black body with a red hourglass mark on their back. They are often found in dark and damp places like wood piles, under decks, or hanging out around concrete blocks. While black widow venom may cause nausea, sweating, and tremors, their bites are rarely serious to healthy adults.

Brown recluse spiders are much smaller, about the size of a quarter. Their bodies are light brown and they can be difficult to differentiate from several other common spiders. Brown recluse spiders are considered rare in our area, preferring to stay in attics, under houses, or other places that are rarely disturbed. Their bites can result in open sores that are slow to heal. Since most spider bites occur on the hands, you can protect yourself when working in areas where either of these spiders may be by simply wearing gloves.

RECIPE CORNER

Baked Figs with Ginger and Cream Cheese

Fresh figs are a fleeting summertime treat. When you get done eating your fill of raw figs, try this simple recipe that my aunt shared with me for baked figs with cream cheese.

Lightly oil or butter a baking dish. Halve ripe figs and place them cut side up in the baking dish. Place a small dollop of cream cheese (or other soft mild cheese) in the center of each fig. Sprinkle lightly with ground ginger (you could substitute another spice if you like, I used cinnamon the other night). Drizzle lightly with honey if desired (we skipped this step, you can add the honey if you want the additional sweetness). Bake in a 350 degree oven until the figs are caramelized around the edges and the cheese is lightly browned, about 30 minutes. Don’t pack the figs too close together or they will steam instead of caramelizing. The figs will produce a light syrup as they cook. Serve them warm or cool and watch them disappear.

CONTACT US

If you have questions about lawn, landscape, or garden problems, contact your local Cooperative Extension office. In Onslow County call 455.5873, Mon – Fri, 8 am and 5 pm, or visit us online anytime at http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu. While you are there, you can post your questions to be answered by email using the ‘Ask an Expert’ widget (in the upper left hand corner).
Lisa Rayburn  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

I’d like to take a minute to introduce myself. I am the new Horticulture Extension Agent here in Onslow County. I work in consumer horticulture – helping homeowners care for their gardens, lawns and landscaping.

I was lucky to be born into an agricultural family. I was raised on working family farms in western New York and West Virginia. My parents raised pick-your-own strawberries, beef cattle, dairy goats and a large vegetable garden.

After studying Horticulture and Environmental Protection at West Virginia University, I moved to the mountains of western NC. There I managed a greenhouse growing native rhododendrons and azaleas from seed. I also started and managed a small plant tissue culture lab at the local community college. After several years in the greenhouse, I transitioned to teaching at the community college. My favorite topics include plant propagation, plant science, fruit and vegetable production and plant identification. I moved to Onslow County this winter to pursue a career with Cooperative Extension and have been busy teaching classes and answering questions since.

If you have questions or suggestions for classes, please let me know. You can stop by the office, call me at 910.455.5873 or send me an email at lisa_rayburn@ncsu.edu. I look forward to meeting you and happy gardening.