

Timing is crucial for success with vegetables Texas

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Timing is critical for garden success. The optimum time to seed eggplant, marigold, pepper, pumpkin, Southern peas, tomato and zinnia varieties with medium-maturity days is by July 1. The early-maturity varieties should be seeded by July 15. In the Brazos Valley, gardeners can grow flowers and vegetables during several seasons. Our climate often lets us grow crops during spring, summer, fall and winter. Summer crops are usually the most challenging in Central Texas. If the winter weather is suitable, cool-season crops are successful. During fall, the flowers develop the brightest colors; vegetable flavor is delicious; and yields may be the largest.

Mulch around all plants in the fall garden to conserve moisture, prevent erosion, insulate the soil from the heat and prevent most weeds. Mulches also can provide more color in the yard. Mulches processed at Elmer, N.J., are sold in black, red, brown, mahogany, blue, green and gold.

Fall vegetables

The easy way to obtain broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, onion and tomato plants is to buy them from the garden center at planting time. Many gardeners like to start their own plants, starting with 1-inch containers, moved up to a 3- or 4-inch size, and then two weeks later, replanted into a 6-inch container. Let the plant grow for another two weeks in the 6-inch container before transplanting into the garden.

Tomato plants might be easy to propagate by cutting off 6-inch suckers or tips, dipping the cut ends into a root hormone and then setting them in a 4-inch cup with potting mix. They need to be kept moist and protected from wind and sun until the root system develops. Clear or white plastic closed sacks will protect them from the wind. The containers and plants should receive afternoon shade. The plants should develop flowers and fruit after daytime and nighttime temperatures cool.

Another method of propagating is to place suckers in water until they develop a good root system. Then set them in a cup with potting mix.

Other vegetables can be direct-seeded into the garden if its soil is moist and friable.

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