

# Easy season: Fall gardening spells success

(BPT) - Scrumptious, healthy veggies, hefty harvests and a break on your grocery bill - many appealing advantages draw people to growing their own vegetables. If you've never gardened before or you're a green thumb, garden-guru, you'll soon figure out that fall's a great time to get growing your own produce. Cooler temperatures and milder sun can spell success for any gardener who takes up the trowel as autumn approaches.

Favorable fall conditions mean growing cool weather crops is comparatively easy, with less watering and care needed for a successful garden. Cool crops will start out strong, growing quickly and then slow their growth as days become shorter and cooler. You'll also need to work less to protect your garden from pests, as both insects and animal populations will taper off in fall. And since weeds will germinate less frequently and grow slower, weeding won't be a time-consuming task. Finally, more rain and less

sun and heat mean you'll need to water less.

If you're ready for gardening success, now is the time to grab that hoe, break some ground and get growing. Tips to get you started:

## Pick your plants

Start with transplants, rather than seed. A shorter, gentler growing season means you need to get started right away. Many local garden centers will have a selection of transplants from producers like Bonnie Plants that will grow well in your geographic region. Transplants will be six weeks old and give you a jump start. You'll be able to harvest sooner than if you start from seed and skip the volatile, sometimes unsuccessful, seed-starting process. Bonnie's transplants come in earth-friendly biodegradable pots, making planting easy, preventing transplant shock and sparing the use of much plastic. As the pot biodegrades, it'll add nutri-

ents to your soil, too. Choose cool crops that your family likes to eat. - Popular fall favorites include:

\* Lacinato kale - A cold-hardy vegetable, kale leaves sweeten after frost. Kale is a super food, and Lacinato leaves extend excellent health benefits, lowering cholesterol, fighting cancer and decreasing inflammation.

\* Early dividend broccoli - Many greens love the fall, and broccoli is no exception. Plant stalks 18 inches apart and get ready for an easy, hearty harvest. Broccoli is high in fiber and calcium.

\* Cabbage - The quintessential fall vegetable, Bonnie's hybrid cabbage grows large, round blue-green heads. From salads to stews, cabbage adds a punch of flavor and nutrients like beta-carotene, vitamins C and K, and plenty of fiber.

\* Romaine lettuce - Romaine packs a big punch with more vitamins, minerals, fiber and phytonutrients than other popular types of lettuce. Rich in fiber, vitamin C and beta-carotene, romaine is especially good for heart

health. Space transplants 18 inches apart.

Once you know what you'll be planting, it's time to get the ground ready. Remove any garden debris from the past season's garden and remove weeds before they go to seed.

Size up your soil. Loosen compacted soil, fluffing it up with a garden fork. Soil test and amend if necessary. Adding a 2-inch layer of bagged compost is always good practice. You can also spread a balanced

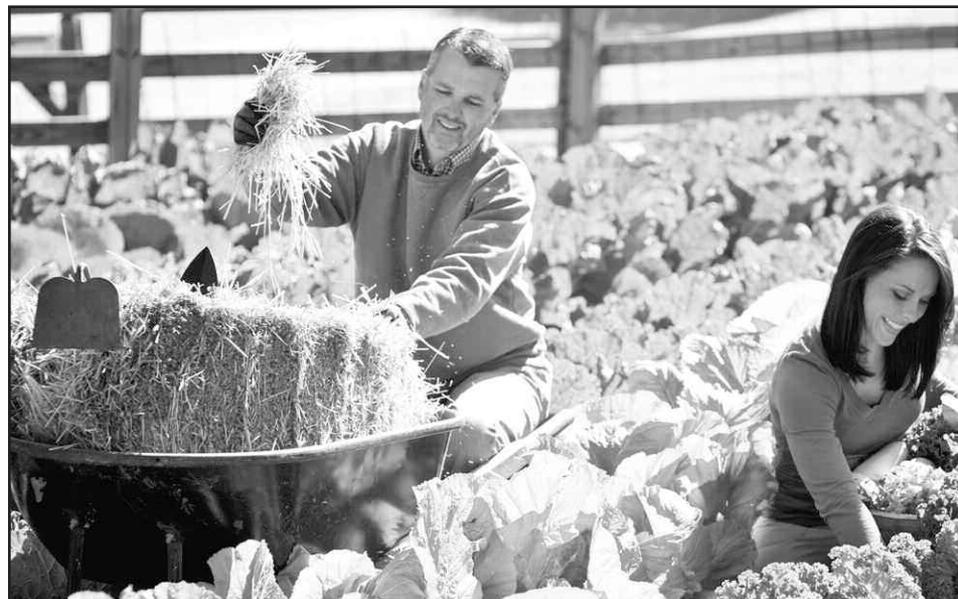
fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, according to labeled instructions, for added nutrients.

Plants will need an inch of moisture per week, either through rain or supplemental watering. You might want to consider raised bed planting; beds are easy to build or buy and allow you to start out with good quality soil. Plus, you'll bend less come harvest time.

Position your plot and let the sunshine in. Most vegetables need full sun - at least six hours per day.

Finally, don't fear frost. When frost threatens, cover plants with floating row cover, cold frame or a cloche. Or, you can grow fall veggies in a container and move pots to a protected location on frosty nights.

Whether you're working in the backyard, a raised bed or in containers on a deck, you'll see how easy and successful fall planting can be. Start now to ensure you enjoy a healthy, plentiful and fulfilling fall harvest.



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