

COOL WEATHER CROPS

Spring, fall, and even winter can be productive growing seasons for gardeners in the mid-Atlantic region. A wide range of crops thrive in cool temperatures and, with a little protection, some can overwinter, giving you two seasons of harvests. Rainfall tends to be more frequent in spring and fall than it is in summer, so you have to do less watering. Also, few pest insects are active during these seasons.

The keys to success with cool weather crops are choosing the right varieties, timing, and growing conditions. Nearly all vegetable crops grow best in full sun, especially during the spring and fall, when the daylight hours are shorter than in summer. Vegetables also need loose, well-drained soil in the cool seasons, when rainfall tends to be frequent. Raised beds are ideal for growing crops in spring and fall, because they allow the soil to warm up sooner in the early part of the season and stay warm as the ground begins to cool later in the year.

QUICK GUIDE TO FAVORITE VEGETABLES

Beans

How to start: Seeds

Best time to plant: Late summer, about 8 weeks before the first frost in autumn.

Variety choices: Pole beans such as 'Kentucky Wonder' can grow up to 6 feet tall—they need poles or other supports to stay upright—so they use space efficiently and are the best choice for small gardens. "Bush," including the widely popular 'Blue Lake', stay compact and need no trellising. 'Resistant Cherokee Wax' bears yellow pods and the bushy plants naturally resist bean mosaic virus that afflicts many other varieties.

Growing tips: Legumes (*which include beans*) extract nitrogen from the air, so they don't need supplemental fertilizer. Water the soil rather than the leaves—beans that stay wet are prone to rust and other fungal diseases.

Broccoli

How to start: Transplants in spring, seeds or transplants in fall

Best time to plant: When the temperatures warm up to 55 degrees F in spring. Start a fall crop about 8 weeks before the first frost in fall.

Variety choices: 'Green Comet' broccoli is a fast-maturing type. Heirloom 'Waltham 29' is prized for its flavor and cold tolerance. Sprouting broccoli gives you small, more tender stalks over a long period.

Growing tips: Broccoli needs lots of water to form a large head, but it rots quickly in soggy soil. Check the soil before watering to be sure it is dry. After you harvest the main head, leave the stalk growing, water and feed it, and you'll get smaller side shoots to eat.

Brussels Sprouts

How to start: Transplants

Best time to plant: When temperatures are warmer than 45 degrees F.

Variety choices: 'Jade Cross' brussels sprouts is a traditional favorite for its reliability. 'Divino' grows sturdy stems that hold themselves up as the sprouts fill out. 'Rubino' has red stalks and sprouts.

Growing tips: When planning how much to grow, bear in mind that each plant produces 1 to 2 pounds of sprouts. Harvest the most mature sprouts at the base of the stalk first and work your way up as the sprouts fill out.

Cabbage

How to start: Seeds or transplants

Best time to plant: Sow seeds indoors in late winter or outdoors in midsummer. Put transplants in garden beds 4 weeks before the last frost in spring.

Variety choices: 'Early Jersey Wakefield' forms dense ball-shaped heads about 90 days after transplant. 'Ruby Ball' is a fast-maturing red variety. 'Clarissa' is a reliable Savoy type, meaning it has crinkled leaves. Bok choy, tatsoi, and napa are popular for Asian cuisine.

Growing tips: To reach their full size, cabbages of all kinds need weekly feeding with dilute fish-and-seaweed fertilizer. Use row covers (*light agricultural fabric*) to keep cabbage white butterflies from laying eggs, which hatch into leaf-munching caterpillars.



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COOL WEATHER CROPS *continued*



Carrots

How to start: Seeds

Best time to plant: Sow seeds directly in the garden when air temperatures stay consistently above 45 degrees F in spring or in late summer, about 90 days before the first frost date in fall.

Variety choices: Carrot varieties are categorized by their shape. 'Danvers' types are long, thin, tapered, and come in purple, yellow and orange. 'Scarlet Nantes' varieties produce rounded, 6-inch-long roots with a deep orange color. 'Imperator' carrots, the common grocery store type, are thick, rounded, bright orange, and especially sweet. 'Hercules' and other Chantenay types are shorter and broader, so they are a good choice for heavy soil. For containers or shallow topsoil, look for Ball varieties such as 'Paris Market'—they are just 3 to 4 inches long and shaped like radishes.

Growing tips: Very loose, well-drained soil is essential for carrot roots to reach their full size. Their ferny foliage makes them an attractive addition to flower borders or mixed containers. You can leave carrots in the ground into late fall and harvest them even into December—cold temperatures cause the roots to become sweeter tasting.

Cauliflower

How to start: Transplants in spring or seeds in midsummer.

Best time to plant: Transplants go in about 4 weeks before the last frost in spring. Sow seeds about 8 weeks before the first frost in fall.

Variety choices: Choose self-blanching varieties such as 'Snow Crown'—its leaves grow over the head to shield it from sunlight and keep it white. 'Lavender' produces purple-hued heads. 'Cheddar' makes yellow heads.

Growing tips: Before preparing to eat cauliflower, soak the heads in salt water for about 30 minutes to drive out any cabbageworms that may be hiding in the folds.

Garlic

How to start: Each clove of garlic you plant grows into a whole new bulb.

Best time to plant: Fall, from early October to mid-November.

Variety choices: Hardneck varieties are best adapted to gardens in the mid-Atlantic region. 'Pennsylvania Dutch' is a spicy variety that produces medium to large bulbs with 4 or 5 cloves per bulb. 'German Red' has red to purplish stripes on its white outer skin and produces large bulbs with approximately 8 cloves each.

Growing tips: Garlic, a member of the lily plant family, grows like a flower bulb. You plant it in fall and harvest it in early summer. The shoots may appear in fall. Cut off the scape (or seed pod) in late spring to encourage bulb development. Many gardeners add the scapes to stir-fries or pickle them.

Kale

How to start: Transplants

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost in spring and late summer for a fall harvest.

Variety choices: 'Winterbor' and 'Redbor' are curly-leaved varieties that tolerate cold temperatures. Try 'Toscano' for tender, "baby" leaves. 'Red Russian' has frilly, reddish-tinged leaves that fit into ornamental beds.

Growing tips: Kale plants often survive through winter beneath a blanket of straw or other loose mulch.

Kohlrabi

How to start: Transplants for a spring crop, seeds for fall.

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost in spring. Sow seeds in late summer for a fall harvest.

Variety choices: 'Winner' has a great flavor that tastes like a cross between turnip and cabbage, but milder and sweeter. It resists the problem of the roots splitting that can plague other varieties. The roots of 'Azur Star' turn a beautiful reddish-purple color.

Growing tips: Kohlrabi can mature in as little as 45 days, so it can go in a spot in your garden where you will later plant heat-loving crops. Loose soil allows the roots to reach their full size.



COOL WEATHER CROPS *continued*

Lettuce and Salad Greens

How to start: Seeds or transplants

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost in spring and again in late summer.

Variety choices: Leaf lettuces such as 'Salad Bowl' allow you to cut off what you need and then continue producing new ones. You can find varieties with red, green, and speckled leaves. If you prefer heading lettuces, romaine types last the longest when temperatures begin to climb later in spring. Mesclun mix provides you with a variety of colors, textures and tastes. Arugula often survives through winter beneath a blanket of straw or other loose mulch. **Growing tips:** Trim off outer leaves from "cut-and-come-again" greens when you harvest and let a few larger ones stay. New growth will emerge from the center. Feed with dilute fish-and-seaweed fertilizer after harvesting.

Parsley

How to start: Transplants or seeds

Best time to plant: After outdoor temperatures stay consistently above 50 degrees F.

Variety choices: Flat-leaved or Italian varieties such as 'Giant of Italy' are preferred by chefs because their flavor is more distinctive than curly types.

Growing tips: Give parsley a little shade through the summer to keep it from burning out in the heat. Parsley is a biennial, meaning it grows leaves in one season and then produces seeds the following year. You can gather those seeds and replant them.

Peas

How to start: Seeds

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost date in spring.

Variety choices: Climbing varieties tend to be more productive than bush types. 'Maestro' is a popular shelling variety. 'Oregon Giant' snow peas produce big but tender pods. 'Sugar Ann' is the earliest bearing sugar snap variety.

Growing tips: Set up a trellis or poles for peas to climb up as they grow. Let the soil dry out in between each time you water—soggy soil can cause pea seedlings and even the mature vines to rot.

Radishes

How to start: Seeds

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost date in spring and again in late summer to early fall.

Variety choices: 'Easter Egg' produces an attractive mix of red, purple, and white roots. 'French Breakfast' roots are more cylindrical and have a mild flavor. 'Miyashige' is the traditional daikon variety, which has long, white, spicy roots.

Growing tips: Fast-growing radishes may be harvested in as little as 40 days after planting so you can put them where other crops will go in later. Loose soil allows the roots to reach their full size.

Spinach

How to start: Seeds

Best time to plant: About 4 weeks before the last frost date in spring and again in late summer to early fall.

Spinach seeds can take 20 days or more to germinate.

Variety choices: 'Bloomsdale Longstanding' is a reliable classic. 'Gazelle' is especially cold-tolerant.

Growing tips: Where spring temperatures heat up quickly, spinach turns bitter almost before you can enjoy it. To avoid this, plant the seeds in late summer. You can harvest a little in the fall—just be sure the plants still have some foliage. After the first frost in fall, cover them with straw or shredded leaves. They will start growing again in spring, long before you can sow seeds.

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