

Cool Crops, Hot Results: August Planting for Zone 7

by Janet Scheren, Fairfax Master Gardener

Late summer may be hot and humid in Northern Virginia, but it's the perfect time to start planning and planting for a productive fall vegetable garden. Now is the time to transition from summer's tomatoes and cucumbers to cool-season crops that thrive in the crisp autumn air. With a typical first frost in late October, there is still have plenty of time to sow or transplant hardy vegetables and herbs that will flourish in the cooler months ahead. Whether you're aiming to extend your season or maximize your garden's output, August is the window of opportunity to plant fresh greens, roots and flavorful herbs for fall and even an early winter harvest.



photo: Virginia Cooperative Extension

Brassicas

Vegetables from the species *Brassica oleracea* are the stars of the fall garden, and August is the month to get them established. These crops prefer cool weather, full sun and fertile soils. Best of all, they actually taste better when kissed by frost. Start from transplants for best results.

Broccoli	Start seeds indoors in late July or transplant seedlings by early August. Allow 60 to 70 days to mature.
Brussels Sprouts	Plant early in August to allow 100 days to mature. These cold lovers continue to produce even after light frosts.
Cabbage	Transplant into the garden from early to mid-August. Beat the frost by choosing early-maturing varieties.
Cauliflower	A bit fussier than broccoli or cabbage, start with transplants to maximize success. Give it 60 to 80 days to mature.
Collards	Another leafy green, it improves in flavor with frost. Sow or transplant from mid- to late August.
Kale	Cold-hardy and vigorous, kale can be direct seeded from mid- to late August and harvested well into winter. It often self-seeds, so don't be surprised if you get a volunteer crop where it was planted in previous seasons.
Mustard Greens	Spicy and quick to grow, these greens mellow out after a touch of frost.

Leafy Greens

Cool-loving greens are quick to mature and offer extended harvests. Sow in succession every 7 to 10 days to ensure a continuous supply.

Arugula or Rocket	This fast-growing green can be cut multiple times. Plant through September for peppery fall salads.
Lettuce	Romaine and leaf types perform best. Sow frequently in small batches to avoid bolting and extend your harvest
Spinach	Wait until late August or early September when soil begins to cool. Spinach can overwinter under light protection and resume growth in spring.

Root Crops

Root vegetables thrive in cool soil and are sweeter after cold weather moves in. Sow these directly into well-prepared beds and keep the soil evenly moist.

Carrot	Sow early in August and allow 70 to 80 days to mature. Use mulch to retain moisture and keep the soil cool.
Radish	These are the speed demons of the fall garden, maturing in just 20 to 30 days. Sow every week or two through September for ongoing harvests.
Turnip	This is a root vegetable and also a Brassica. Sow in mid-August for roots and greens. Turnips tolerate light frost well and mature in about 60 days.
Beet or Beetroot	Sow through mid-August. Beets mature in about 50 to 60 days. Both roots and greens are edible.

Get a Jump on Spring

Certain crops don't mature in fall but are planted now to get a head start on spring.

Garlic	While planting happens in October or early November, begin prepping your garlic bed in late August. Choose hardneck varieties for better cold tolerance.
Onion sets	Overwintering onions can be planted in late August through early September. They'll establish roots in fall and resume growth in spring.

Herbs for the Fall Garden

Don't forget to include herbs in your fall planting plan. Many herbs thrive in the milder temperatures of late summer and early fall and can continue producing through the first frost or even later with protection.

Cilantro or Coriander	Sow in mid- to late August for flavorful leaves in fall. Cilantro bolts quickly in hot weather but thrives in cooler temperatures.
Chervil	A French favorite with a subtle anise flavor, chervil likes cool, moist conditions. Sow directly in late August to early September in partial shade.
Dill	Fast-growing and tolerant of light frost, annual dill can be sown in early August. It matures in 30 to 60 days, making it ideal for a fall harvest.
Fennel	Both leaf and bulb types can be sown in early August. Bulbing fennel needs to mature before frost, while fronds can be harvested earlier.
Parsley	Slow to germinate, parsley can be started indoors or direct-sown in early to mid-August. Once established, it's remarkably cold-hardy and can be harvested throughout winter with light protection. Parsley is a biennial herb. It grows leaves its first year, then flowers and sets seed its second season. It is usually treated as an annual and regrown each year.
Mint	Transplant or divide mint in late summer. It's best grown in containers or isolated beds to contain its aggressive spread. Hardy and fragrant, mint holds up well in cooler weather.
Oregano	Plant from transplants now so it can establish before winter. Oregano is a tough perennial in Zone 7 and offers robust spring growth.
Sage	Another hardy perennial, sage benefits from August planting to root deeply before the cold sets in. It prefers full sun and good drainage.
Thyme	A slow grower, perennial thyme should be planted from transplants in August. Once established, it's extremely hardy and will thrive year after year. Tips for Success

Try to cool the soil in fall. August heat can inhibit germination. Use straw mulch or light shade cloth to moderate soil temperature for delicate seedlings. Use succession planting for leafy crops like lettuce, radishes, spinach and arugula, plant small batches every week or two to extend your harvest window well into fall.

Be sure to water wisely. Keep seedbeds consistently moist, especially during germination. Water early in the day to reduce disease risk. Provide frost protection if necessary. Be prepared with floating row covers, cold frames or low tunnels to extend your growing season after the first frost. And finally, control weeds. Weeds can outcompete fall seedlings. Stay vigilant and use mulch to suppress them naturally.

References

- [Virginia's Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant](#), Virginia Cooperative Extension
- [Time to think about fall planting!](#), University of Maryland Extension
- [Vegetable Planting Calendar](#), University of Maryland Extension
- [Time to Plant a Fall Vegetable Garden](#), North Carolina State Cooperative Extension (Wayne County)
- [Art of Growing Herbs with Billi Parus](#), Prince George Master Gardener Association and Virginia Cooperative Extension