

Vegetable Gardening in July – Succession Planting and Cover Crops (published 2024-07-06)

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I hope you are enjoying harvesting some of the vegetables that you have planted earlier this year especially those radishes, beans, potatoes, beets, and carrots. If so, remember that July is the time for doing succession planting. To enjoy freshly harvested vegetables until the first frost, you can plant a few of each in a pattern that allows you to be harvesting them as they mature. For example, bush beans can be planted at 14-to-20-day intervals until the end of August. At each interval, plant only a few at a time. Then as one planting has finished producing, the next planting will be beginning to produce. The general recommendation for succession planting is to look at the date for the first frost that typically happens in your zone, then read the seed package to see how long until maturity and harvest. Then add 10 to 14 days to that time to allow for seed germination to determine the last date for planting. So, if the first frost date is October 24th and time to maturity is 8 weeks, subtract 70 days or 10 weeks from October 24th. The last date for planting would be August 15th.

Vegetables that are particularly suitable for succession planting to be harvested until fall frost include bush and pole beans, carrots, beets, radish, Swiss chard, cucumbers, eggplant, muskmelons, okra, peppers, summer and winter squash, corn, and watermelon.

Other things that you can sow in your vegetable garden in July include arugula, basil, fennel, cantaloupe, leeks, Irish potatoes, green onions, and turnips. July is also the time to be putting in transplants of cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, and Brussel sprouts for fall harvest.

Based on weather predictions, this summer will be typically warmer than normal, which will increase the need for watering your vegetables. It is possible to buy devices that measure soil moisture. If using one, be sure to inject it at least 4 inches into the ground to determine if you should add water. It is best to water in the morning so the plants have moisture for the sunlight hours. To reduce the risk of mold developing, water the soil not the plant leaves. You should also consider adding a bit of general fertilizer such as 5-5-5 rated fertilizer about every two weeks.

If you have harvested a crop and do not wish to plant another crop, then be sure you don't leave the ground bare or you will have to deal with a lot of weeds next year. The best option is to cover the ground with something that will add organic matter to soil but not allow weeds to grow. Cover crops can provide a source of nitrogen, limit erosion, disrupt insect and disease life cycles and reduce weed growth. One option is buckwheat which will suppress weed growth and when cut down decomposes rapidly. The main disadvantage to buckwheat is that it sets seed quickly, within 4 to 6 weeks, and if allowed to produced seeds, can create a weed problem for subsequent crops. Legumes such as cowpea and soybean are good choices as they will enrich the nitrogen composition of the soil. If you don't want to grow a cover crop, then covering the soil with 4 inches of straw or leaves is another option to use organic material which can then decompose to add to the soil. If you can't do these forms of covering bare ground, then you may use cardboard. However, be sure to remove any tape and colored printing.

Succession planting is a great way to keep enjoying summer harvests all the way until the first frost. And cover crops will make next year's garden healthier and less work with weeds under control. What could be better?

Resources

“Succession Planting,”

<https://extension.wvu.edu/lawn-gardening-pests/gardening/garden-management/succession-planting>

“Summer Cover Crops,”

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/summer-cover-crops>

“What Can Summer Cover Crops Do for Soil Health and Future Crops?,”

<https://plant-pest-advisory.rutgers.edu/what-can-summer-cover-crops-do-for-soil-health-and-future-crops/>

“Cover Crops and Green Manures,”

<https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2024/01/W235-G-cover-crops.pdf>

“The Tennessee Vegetable Garden – Garden Planning, Plant Preparation and Planting,”

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W346-B.pdf>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.