



Fall or Cool Season Vegetables

Zoom presentation for Farm Supply Company, Saturday, September 26, 2020.
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Most gardeners will be harvesting the last of their summer produce soon, putting their gardens to bed for the winter. However, on the Central Coast we are lucky enough to have weather and microclimates that allow us to grow vegetables through the winter and now is the time to plant!

Planting zones

Because San Luis Obispo County has several planting zones it is important for you to know what your zone is for successful gardening.

The USDA has divided the United States into 11 planting zones. In the West gardeners tend to use the 24-zone system created by Sunset Magazine. Sunset has factored in winter temperatures, summer highs, length of growing seasons, humidity, and rainfall patterns. Sunset zones are much more precise, and I will be referring to their zones during this presentation.

In San Luis Obispo County Sunset planting zone 7 includes California Valley, Creston, Shandon, Paso Robles, Atascadero, Templeton, and San Miguel.



City of San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande and Pismo are Sunset planting zone 15.

Morro Bay is Sunset planting zone 16.

San Simeon and Cambria are Sunset planting zone 17.

First frost dates

So now that you know your planting zones it would be helpful to know the approximate date of your first frost.

For the interior (California Valley, Creston, Shandon) your first frost occurs approximately on October 7.

Paso Robles, Atascadero, Templeton, and San Miguel is approximately November 11.

The city of San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande, Pismo, Morro Bay, San Simeon and Cambria is approximately December 31.

What to plant

Do you plant seed or transplants? It really depends on your first frost. If you are direct sowing seed in your garden, you need to sow at the latest 10 to 12 weeks before your first frost.

In Creston, your first frost is approximately October 7 so your ideal planting time for sowing seed would have been around the end of July. You can still try sowing by seed but beware of your first frost date and take appropriate frost protection.

For Paso Robles and the North County area now is the time to direct sow into the ground.



Along the Coast, City of San Luis Obispo, and South, you have until the middle of October to direct sow. However, the sooner you sow the more established your plants will be if frost should occur.

Another consideration is soil temperature. These vegetables can withstand frosts and freezes with protection however they need warm soils to germinate. The Farm Supply Company sales soil thermometers which can be helpful during direct sowing.

But what are we going to plant??

Root vegetables, roots being those parts of the plant usually consumed but it has now become popular to eat the leafy portion of some of these vegetables:

1. Beet
2. Carrot
3. Garlic
4. Leek
5. Parsnip
6. Radish
7. Shallots
8. Turnip

Root vegetables are usually direct sown into the garden. Follow the seed package directions, making sure to thin, as necessary. It will be important to use frost protection if needed.

If you do plant transplants make sure to keep the soil around the plant when you transplant to help with plant shock. If the roots are circled in the container, gently loosen the roots before placing in your prepared hole.

Stem vegetables include:

1. Asparagus
2. Rhubarb.



Asparagus and Rhubarb are spring vegetables however the transplants or “crowns” need to be planted in the fall while they are dormant. I would suggest using transplants for these vegetables. These two vegetables can be difficult to propagate and for better success a transplant works best. They can also be perennial, meaning they will continue to come back year after year. You will need to water throughout the year and provide mulch during the winter to protect the crowns. In late spring or early summer allow asparagus to develop into fronds. This will provide energy for next year’s crop. When the fronds turn yellow, cut about 1 inch above the ground and remove.

Flowering vegetables include:

1. Artichoke
2. Broccoli
3. Cauliflower

These three vegetables are immature flowers. Broccoli and cauliflower are from the Brassicaceae family and an artichoke is a thistle! You can grow these vegetables from seed, but you will save yourself literally months (and a faster harvest) if you use transplants. Artichokes can be a perennial if you continue to water and fertilize throughout the summer and take proper frost protection in the winter.

Leaf vegetables include:

1. Bok Choy
2. Brussel Sprouts
3. Cabbage
4. Celery
5. Chard
6. Cilantro
7. Chives
8. Lettuce
9. Parsley
10. Spinach



Brussel sprouts and celery are slow growing. I would recommend using transplants just to shorten your growing season and speed up your harvest time. Lettuce, spinach, and chard can be harvested throughout the growing season. They will continue to sprout new leaves as long as you harvest regularly.

Fava beans and Snow peas:

Fava beans and snow peas are two other crops that will give you vegetables throughout the season. You will need to fertilize, water, and protect from frost.

Fertilize

You need to fertilize a fall garden just as you do your spring garden. Especially since you are probably planting your garden in the same spot you just pulled your summer garden. Few of us have gardens with enough room to allow a plot to go fallow for a planting season.

When looking at the front of a fertilizer bag you will see 3 numbers. The first number is the amount of nitrogen (N). The second number is phosphorus (P) and the third is potassium (K). Nitrogen will give you greener bushier plants. (It is also good for leafy or stem vegetables). Phosphorus encourages fruit and flower production (good for root crops or flowering vegetables). Potassium influences a plant's heartiness and vigor. If you are growing lettuce, you would want a fertilizer that has a high first number. If you are growing carrots, then you will want a fertilizer that has a higher second number.

The best fertilizers to use are granular fertilizers or compost that will provide nutrients for several weeks or months. Liquid fertilizers give your plant a quick boost. Your type of soil will also play a role in how well your fertilizer will work. If you have sandy soil, the nutrients from the fertilizer will flow through your soil faster than if you have loam or clay soil.

Water



The best water system is a drip system as it delivers the same amount of water at the same time every day. If you live on the coast or the city of San Luis Obispo and South, you might be able to still use a drip system. However, water that remains in the system or in timers during a freeze could expand, splitting hoses and breaking timers. Hand watering is a good option plus you will see your plants daily and can notice any pest damage or plant problems. When rain is forecast make sure to not water your garden until the soil has dried out after the rain. Do not let the soil dry out more than an inch. A moisture meter works great for this application.

Frost protection

Cloches:

Cloches are a small cover, usually translucent, for protecting or forcing plants. For this presentation we are going to use the cloche as a protection for frost. Cloches can be anything that covers a plant to protect it from frost or freeze. It is especially important to remember to remove the cloche in the morning to allow the plant to breathe and obtain water. If you can find a cloche that has an opening at the top then most of your issues may be resolved however depending on what material the cloche is made of it may not receive sun (cardboard box) or the sun may actually burn it (glass cloche).

Row covers

You can use a sheet or other material for row covers however it really is best to use a material that is designed for gardens. The cover can be laid directly on your plants, but I would consider some type of structure to hold up the row cover as the rain will weigh it down and could crush your plants. If you do not want to use a structure you can always roll your cover back and then reapply when the rain is over. Other benefits are the cover breathes and still allows sunlight to come through. And of course, it is a great protection for frost and freeze. A warning though, I would recommend removing the cover often. One winter I did not



remove the cover for a couple of weeks and when I did, I noticed I had created a perfect greenhouse for my plants, which were now full of bugs. Apparently, they liked the warmer atmosphere too.

Other concerns

Wind

Wind protection can be a consideration depending on your area. Cloches can do double duty protecting from wind as well as frost. Tie taller plants to stakes, trellises or other supports. If you have severe winds you can make a wall or circle your most vulnerable plants with straw hay, stacked 1 or 2 bales on top of each other. At the end of the season you can use the straw for mulch!

Mulch

Mulch is particularly important in a fall and winter garden. It will help to keep the roots warm during a frost or freeze. Mulch can be straw, wood chips, even a thick layer of compost.

Gardening in the fall and winter can be rewarding and delicious! It is wonderful to be able to grab a handful of spinach or make a salad from baby greens picked from your garden. I hope this presentation has helped you with planning your Fall garden.

Happy gardening!!