

Fall Gardening in Central Iowa - Suggested Varieties to Try

By mid-July, gardeners in Zone 5a still have roughly 90 days left in our growing season. That makes it the perfect time for planning a bountiful FALL GARDEN in spots freed up by the harvest of garlic and potatoes, peas and spring greens.

Yep. A fall garden. Did you know? Cooler late summer temps and shorter autumn days present the perfect conditions for another planting of cool-season brassicas like kale, kohlrabi, bok choy and Chinese cabbage, and root veggies like carrots, beets, turnips and radishes. Don't forget the greens - spinach, collard, mustard, chard and more. All of these plus fresh plantings of lettuce, herbs, beans and peas are in our fall garden plans.



Kale - Lacinato



Kale - Dwarf Siberian



Kohlrabi - Early White Vienna



Escarole - Broadleaf Batavian



Broccoli Raab - Sorrento

- **Brassicas** – The brassica family is famous for short-season, frost-tolerant veggies, and it's earned a big chunk of our garden. We're featuring "Black Tuscan" lacinato kale, "Early White Vienna" kohlrabi, and "Michihili" chinese cabbage. Because these need cool temps under 75 degrees to germinate, we'll start them inside and plant out in mid-August. Or try "Sorrento" broccoli raab, a beloved Italian vegetable which can be direct sown in mid-August.
- **Greens** – Direct sow is also recommended for spinach, collard, mustard, mache, sorrel, and shiso. We're featuring "Broadleaf Batavian" escarole, five-star "Viroflay" spinach and two delicious spinach imposters – "Perpetual Spinach" chard and "New Zealand Spinach", as well as mache and sorrel. All packed with leafy-green nutrition. Versatile choices for a fall garden, because greens also thrive quite well in containers and in part-shade.
- **Squash** – Bet you didn't expect to see this one on the list! We found "Lebanese White Bush" a small-space summer squash variety that matures in just 50 days. We might even outsmart the squash bugs and borers with a late planting of their favorite snack. Why not give it a try?
- **Lettuce** – Best varieties are romaine and leaf types. Romaine can be started inside, but all can be direct sown. We're featuring "All Year Round" butterhead and "Fall and Winter Mix", which we think will make a lovely patio container and will provide easy access for lunch-time salads.
- **Root vegetables** – carrot, beet, turnip, radish. Direct sow all root veggies. Try "Autumn King" carrots, "Lutz Green Leaf" beets, "Black Spanish Round" radishes, "White Icicle" radishes, or the reliable, old standby "Purple Top White Globe" turnip. Bonus – Eat the tasty greens!
- **Beans** – Choose bush beans, rather than pole beans. Beans are warm season, tender annual which will die upon the first frost. Direct sow bush beans through mid-August, and you'll be harvesting fresh green beans the whole month of September. We're featuring "Strike", a vigorous standard green bean and "Roma II", a delicious Italian flat bean.
- **Peas** – Choose snow or sugar snap, rather than shelling. Peas are cool-season annuals and cannot handle the summer heat, just like me. Direct sow fall peas in late August. Try our featured snow pea "Oregon Sugar Pod II".
- **Herbs** – Great for successive plantings; consider planting basil and cilantro in attractive pots to bring inside before the first fall frost. Parsley is frost-tolerant and attractive, although slow to germinate. Our favorite herb, basil is quick to germinate, easy-peasy to transplant and a workhorse in the kitchen. We're featuring "Dwarf Greek" basil, perfect for containers.
- **Onions** – Try direct-sowing our pick for quick-maturing bunching onions "Tokyo Long White".



Carrot - Autumn King



Radish - White Icicle



Radish - Black Spanish Round



Lettuce - Fall & Winter Mix



Lettuce - All Year Round

When considering other fall garden possibilities, here are some tips: 1) look for vegetables and herbs which mature in 70 days or less, 2) consider covering the more tender annuals to extend the growing season, especially if frost is forecasted, 3) remember that most brassicas will happily "tolerate" a light frost, and 4) alliums and root crops may actually be IMPROVED by frost and can often be left in place until you are ready to harvest and use them. 5) Bonus – all of these, with the exception of green beans and summer squash-can be grown inside year round as microgreens!

First Frost Date in Fall

Location	Date of first 32°F freeze in 10% of years	Date of first 32°F freeze in 50% of years	Date of first 32°F freeze in 90% of years
Des Moines	Sept. 26	Oct. 10	Oct. 27



Beet - Lutz Green Leaf



Bean - Strike Bush Bean



Chard - Perpetual Spinach



Fall Gardening Handout + a variety of Fall seed donations provided by Nine Square Feet

Planting Dates for Fall ❄️ Based on Frost Dates

🌻 almanac.com/gardening/planting-calendar/zipcode/50323

Crop	Start Seeds Indoors by...	Plant Seedlings Outdoors by...	Start Seeds Outdoors by...
Arugula	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 9
Beets	N/A	N/A	❄️ Aug 30
Cabbage	❄️ Jun 23	❄️ Jul 21	N/A
Carrots	N/A	N/A	❄️ Aug 25
Green Beans	N/A	N/A	❄️ Jul 11
Kale	❄️ Jul 23	❄️ Aug 20	N/A
Kohlrabi	N/A	N/A	❄️ Aug 25
Lettuce	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 4
Peas	N/A	N/A	❄️ Aug 10
Radishes	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 9
Spinach	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 19
Swiss Chard	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 4
Turnips	N/A	N/A	❄️ Sep 4
Zucchini	N/A	N/A	❄️ Jul 16

On average, your first fall frost occurs on October 14 (at DES MOINES INTL AP, IA climate station).