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Fall Gardening Starts Now

The fall spirit is in the air, and many thoughts turn to cleaning up the garden and letting things go dormant. However, the tail end of summer and the start of fall are also great times to plant new things.

There are many gardening options right now: short-season vegetables and next year's garlic, establishing perennial root systems before winter, and even over-seeding the lawn. To narrow it down, let's focus on the vegetables that can get a good yield before the frosts and freezes arrive.

To start, any good garden calendar will start with a timeline based on Day to Maturity (DTM). Knowing how long it takes to get a crop will help to determine what to plant. The first frost date in southeast Kansas is around October 20th. Working backward from the DTM means that anything with about 40 days to maturity should be viable.

Some crops that mature in 50 days or less include radish, lettuce, and spinach. Crops like beans, peas, and broccoli are possible, especially if you have a well-developed transplant or a particularly early maturing cultivar. However, with tender crops like beans and peas, you should plan to use a row cover to protect them from the late-October chill. Broccoli is cold-tolerant, so it can handle an evening or two below 40 degrees.

Lastly, fall is an excellent time to plant garlic, and it can wait a little longer than leafy vegetables. A good garlic bulb needs about 9 months to develop, a lot like a baby. Planting in October should yield a fully mature garlic head in July of next year. Both soft neck and hard neck varieties can grow in Kansas. Hard neck varieties have the benefit of edible flower stalks, called scapes, in late spring. Use cloves from a trusted garlic variety for planting, and avoid the ones in the grocery aisle. Plant individual cloves about two inches deep and six inches apart, much like any other bulb.

While some parts of the garden and landscape may be slowing down, there's still more to plant. Count the days to maturity and beat the frost to get a healthy, tasty reward.

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