

# Growing fruit and vegetables in Canberra

Text by Keith Colls\*; photos Adrienne Fazekas

**We often have a week or two of relatively warm weather in late winter or early spring and one of the great delights of these interludes is the bountiful harvest such warm spells promise after a cold winter.** There is a strong temptation to plant out our whole vegetable garden all at once. The glut produced will be more than enough to feed an army, much more than we can ever use. No matter how feverishly we freeze, dry and preserve, much of our garden produce has to be recycled through the compost heap. The angst this causes can easily be avoided by following a simple succession planting schedule.

**In Canberra we have a wonderful climate for growing vegetables all year round.**

For example with beetroot we can have fresh picked beetroot from the garden for eight or nine months of the year by planting just a few seeds every month between September and February. It is relatively easy to work out a succession planting schedule by subtracting the number of months for a plant to reach maturity from the number of months it can survive unprotected in the garden. The result is the number of successive months that seed can be planted out to extend the harvest. Adjustments will have to be made for slowing growth in the colder months and the effect of changing day length and temperature fluctuations which cause some plants to bolt to seed. Those who have poly-tunnels or glass houses may be able to squeeze in an extra one or two months of harvest.

There is a long list of plants that can be planted out between August and October. In August Jerusalem artichokes and rhubarb crowns can be planted out as well as seeds of lettuce or mesclun salad mix, coriander, peas, radish and spinach. Seedlings of leeks, broccoli (winter varieties), celeriac, Chinese leafy greens (mazuma, pak choi, senposai etc.) can be started in a heated tray or glasshouse. It is also time to tidy up the herb garden, dividing and replanting oregano, marjoram, tarragon,

chives and winter savoury. Prune grapes, spray according to the label for fungal diseases (copper or lime sulphur) which may have overwintered from autumn, and spray for grape blister mite at bud burst if it was a problem last year. Citrus can also be sprayed with white oil for scale.

In September, in addition to the seeds for August, beetroot and rocket can be planted and globe artichokes can be planted out. Potatoes can be planted later in the month in a sheltered spot. In addition to the seedlings mentioned for August, seedlings of cabbage, endive, silverbeet and spring onions can also be started. Those of an adventurous spirit with a warm sheltered spot can also start seedlings of capsicums and eggplants. Fruit trees will benefit from a generous side dressing of compost. Insect pests will start to become active as the temperature warms, usually before their natural predators and parasites are in sufficient numbers to keep the pests in check. At this stage gardeners need to be particularly vigilant with regular inspections of crops and judicious squashing of pests before their numbers get out of control.

In October succession planting of seeds of beetroot, coriander, English spinach, mesclun, radish and rocket can be continued and the main plantings of cabbage and carrot can be made. Late in the month plant seeds of bean, zucchini, pumpkin, squash, sweet corn and cucumber as well as seedlings of frost sensitive plants raised earlier, although many gardeners do not plant out frost sensitive seedlings until the Melbourne Cup weekend. Seedlings of basil, tomato, celeriac, celery, endive, leeks, lettuce (cos), parsley, silverbeet and spring onions may be started for later succession plantings. Regular checking of pest numbers is required to keep pests under control. If pest numbers reach unacceptable levels care must be taken to protect predator and parasitic insects from the effects of any pesticides used.

Well-planned succession planting in spring promises a bountiful but manageable summer and autumn harvest.



Globe artichoke



Hurst green shaft peas



White onions

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