

August Approaches in Your Garden...

July is almost over and August is fast-approaching. The nights have finally warmed up and so has the soil. Many gardeners are starting to harvest bounties of summer vegetables – tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and string beans to name a few. The incredible taste of the homegrown bounty reminds me why I am willing to spend back-breaking hours amending my soil and countless nights in May and June tossing bed sheets over tender plants before a frost. I am willing to coax ladybugs to stay in my yard, use jets of water to dispel aphids on a daily basis, and pay a neighbor to watch my garden when I am gone (far more than the produce would cost at the Farmer's Market)- all because I remember and love the taste of a homegrown tomato. The first of August represents a peak in bounty and the fruition of all of my hard work and time - kind of like climbing a mountain and realizing its all downhill from the peak. Hitting the first of August means that, instead of counting days after the last frost of the spring, I am now counting the days until the first frost of the fall. The slide into autumn has begun.

This shift always gets me thinking again about some of my favorite cool-season crops – crops that aren't afraid of a touch of frost. For the last two years, I've turned thinking into motivation to replant some of those crops and extend my harvest into the fall. We've picked most of our broccoli and cauliflower by now and even the cabbage and Brussels sprouts are readying quickly. Many of my spring crops have been harvested leaving space in my garden to replant some of our favorites. In mid to late July, I direct seed cabbages, cauliflower, and broccoli into my garden, usually choosing an area in a different section than those I planted in the spring. Around the first of August, I add plantings of beets, spinach, and other greens. I also begin planting small rows of lettuce and radishes and continue these plantings every 10 days through August. In addition, I seed some of our favorite fresh herbs such as cilantro, parsley, and basil into a couple of larger pots which I place out on my sunny deck. I carefully thin the seedlings to provide a strong environment for the plants- -knowing that we will be able to have a fresh supply of herbs into fall and winter. Seeded this way, the herbs have plenty of time to establish and strengthen in the outdoor sun before bringing them in for use during the fall and winter. This type of replanting provides us with a fresh supply of garden bounty even as fall approaches.

I have had great luck growing these cool season plants a second time in late summer. The warm soil speeds seed germination, and the plants grow quickly with the warmer temperatures and higher humidity. I do find that it is often necessary to thin the plants to ensure that they have adequate spacing during more humid weather; however, it is worth a bit of extra work to be able to harvest homegrown vegetables for just a bit longer in the fall. Last year, we picked vegetables from our garden through October and into the first weeks of November. Planting a second round of cool-season crops is a great way to increase harvest and extend the Flagstaff gardening season. Happy gardening!!!