



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

PLANTING IN THE WINTER

By Laurie Meyerpeter, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I am interested in growing food in my garden. Can I plant anything in the winter?

A There are many food plants that you can plant now but there are a few precautions. During the winter months, our clay soils may be too wet to plant after a rainfall. Working with overly wet soil may damage the soil structure. If you dig a shovelful of dirt and it comes out in one heavy clod, consider waiting a few days before tilling or digging. Also, soil and air temperatures may be cold and may inhibit germination and growth.

The best plants to plant now are bare root plants. These are available in nurseries during January and February and include fruit trees, cane berries, strawberries, artichokes, horseradish, grapes, asparagus, rhubarb, and kiwi fruit. Plant as soon as possible after purchasing and water roots well before and after planting to prevent drying out and encourage new growth. Winter is the only time that bare root plants are available!

Planting seeds is iffy in the middle of winter as germination may be poor if soil temperatures are cold. The best seeds for cold weather planting are vegetables like leaf lettuce, spinach, and radishes and will offer the best chance for success. Planting and growing seeds in a large pot on a patio is another idea; the soil in pots may heat up faster than the earth so seeds might sprout better. A pot of leaf lettuce that you can pluck for winter salads is a nice thing to have on a sunny porch.

Planting seedlings is another possibility. They'll grow slowly throughout the winter but may produce a nice early crop by early spring. Seedlings are available at local nurseries or gardeners can start their own in a sunny windowsill. Leaf lettuce, broccoli, cabbages, and cauliflower are good choices. Whether planting seeds or seedlings, using plenty of compost and making raised beds or mounded soil will increase your chances for success.

Many experienced gardeners also use row covers and cold frames to extend the season. In the future, consider planting a fall garden for harvests throughout the winter months. And don't forget flowers for color. Pick up a few blooming beauties at the nursery throughout the year and tuck them in between the edibles!

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: ceplacer@ucdavis.edu

The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State law and University policy, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, medical condition (cancer-related), ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, California 94607-5200. (510) 987-0096. United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, Placer & Nevada Counties cooperating.

NEVADA COUNTY

255 So Auburn
Grass Valley, CA 95945
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: cenevada@ucdavis.edu