

READY, SET, GO...

With the rising costs of fresh food from your local groceries, many consumers are converting their lawns, balconies, and patios to garden plots whether turning over the sod to form rows of tilled soil, constructing raised garden beds, or utilizing a multitude of containers to grow tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, lettuce, spinach and more.

From the purchase of seed and seedlings, early spring is a flurry of activity among gardeners across the nation in a race to take advantage of the promise of warmer weather. By mid-April to late November, the seedlings of labors are producing a plentiful harvest to be enjoyed fresh and/or stored for winter.

But as seasons change with the approach of winter, many gardeners begin the process of closing down their growing season of fresh foods, opting to return the markets to supply their lunch boxes and supper plates with greens. Grumbling as they fill their carts, yet wondering in the recesses of their minds if AND how to extend their gardens growing season.

The upside to this article is growing a winter garden **is** feasible even in subzero temperatures! Now I know, you might doubt if it's even possible without the use of a greenhouse, but indeed with a few simple preparations, even those whom annually utilize raised beds for their families' supply of fresh produce may extend their growing season through the winter months (see photos below)!

While the winter season of gardening is mid-rotation, and, for many, thoughts have turned to spring, seed catalogues, soil testing and garden amendment; it's also time to begin the preparations to become a year-round vegetable gardener! Ready, Set, Go...

Stage 1: Timing is Key

Timing is essential to be successful at raising a winter garden. From the timing of plantings to selecting successive crops, as you start the planning process for your spring and summer gardens so should you start planning your fall AND winter gardens.

Stage 2: Seed Selections

Seed selections should focus on the growing seasons – Cool, Warm and Cold. As you begin to select seeds to order, take time to match seeds with their optimum growing season. A successful winter garden is a garden filled with sown seeds selected for a cold season (e.g.: Leeks, Parsnip, Lettuce, Scallions, Radishes, Parsley, Kale, Spinach, Beets, Carrots, etc...).

Note: to be a successful 365 days-a-year vegetable gardener, you need to know the length and average dates of frost-free season, to learn more, ask one of the Lake Cumberland Master Gardeners, or a horticultural agent with your local Cooperative Extension Service.

Stage 3: Intensive Gardening

In addition to selecting the right varieties and planting with the seasons, a year-round vegetable garden Wintrelies on intensive gardening practices including planting close together, rotational planting and

amending the soil. To be successful throughout each season, it's not just what you grow. It's where you grow it *and* the company it keeps. Grow the right plants together and you will reap benefits including better growth and reduced pests.

Stage 4: Growing in the Off-Season – WINTER

From bottomless cold frames, constructed of wood, cinder blocks or even straw bales to mini hoop tunnels to even a greenhouse; growing in the off-season means protecting cold season plants from the danger of prolonged freezing temperatures AND extending your growing season to 365 days.

Growing a vegetable garden year-round is not only a wonderful way to supplement your household's groceries, but it is reality easy once you start the process, but if you are READY to learn more about year-round gardening, then consider enrolling in a workshop on Winter Gardening with the Cooperative Extension Service and/or becoming a Master Gardener.

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The winter garden on 1/1/2023 (Photo Deborah Messenger)



Radish harvest on 1/19/2023 (Photo Deborah Messenger)