JANUARY

There are some cold-hardy plants that can be transplanted into the gardens in January, but even if covered during our unpredictable deep freezes, you may lose some of your crops. If you have a greenhouse, keep backup seedlings to replant if needed. It helps with the depression after losing the crops in the garden \bigcirc . Much of January is spent cleaning up the gardens from the last of the Fall crops and preparing for spring planting.

January is also time to prune your non-citrus fruit trees (peach, plum, apple, pear, persimmon, pomegranate). If you'd like some tips, here are links to past newsletters where I've shown how to do this (Jan 26, 2019 and Jan 25, 2020). The best fruit tree pruning instructions I've found for this area are in a book written by Tom LeRoy and Bill Adams, former AgriLife extension agents. The book is called *The Southern Kitchen Garden: Vegetables, Fruits, Herbs and Flowers Essential for the Southern Cook.* Here's a link to the book on Amazon.

I often get surprised by how long some plants take to grow during the cooler temperatures and shorter days of winter. I can't seem to find the reference, but I've read that plant growth slows down 10-15% for every 5 deg F below optimal growing temperature. That's why it takes only 25 days to grow a radish during late spring and early fall, but 40-50 days for winter radishes (unless hoop houses or heated greenhouses are used).

As another example, most carrots require 70-80 days to grow (per the seed catalogs – for summer growing in the northern US), but since we grow them here during the cooler and shorter day seasons (fall and winter), they take 100-120 days, depending on how much shade your garden gets. If you're interested, I've written an entire newsletter about ideal growing conditions for the best tasting carrots (Jan 11, 2020). You can grow them here in summer (they will grow, with lots of pest pressure), but they are tough and bitter (not worth growing in my opinion).

Here's the January planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct Flats (indoors, with grow lights and heat mats)

Tomatoes – by mid-Jan	 Eggplant – by mid-Jan
	 Peppers – by mid-Jan

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Jan / Feb)

Scallions	Kohlrabi
Lettuce and Arugula	Spinach, Pak Choy
Fennel	 Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley

Direct Seeding in Garden

٠	Carrots – over sow, to thin later	•	Beets and Turnips
•	Daikon Radishes	•	Salad Radishes
•	Scallions (scattered)	•	Sugar Snap Peas

Kale, Pak Choy	 Scallions (from flats planted in Dec)
Spinach, Lettuce	Rhubarb
Arugula	Celery / Celeriac
 Onion sets – by Jan 15 	Fennel
 Garlic cloves – by mid-Jan 	Kohlrabi
 Strawberries – by mid-Jan 	

FEBRUARY

Although the weather in February can be a little unpredictable for gardening, it is the time to get your raised planting beds ready for Spring crops. That means 1. weeding, 2. amending (fertilizer, kelp meal, bonemeal, etc.), and 3. tilling with a hand cultivator or with a rototiller. The goal is to have everything ready for planting tomatoes in March and peppers and eggplants in April. If the soil level of your beds has dropped due to compaction or decomposition or organic matter during the growing seasons, this is the time to add organic matter to raise the soil level.

There are a few late Winter and early Spring crops that you can plant in February. If we just had a hard freeze, you may be spending a LOT of time cleaning up the gardens.

Early February is also your last chance to prune your non-citrus fruit trees (peach, plum, apple, pear, persimmon, pomegranate) before they begin to come out of winter dormancy.

And if you have some time left over 3, here are a few other items for February:

- Build raised beds and plant blueberry plants remember these need <u>excellent</u> drainage and water every day in the summer!
- Fertilize and mulch all fruit trees (including citrus)
- Transplant tomatoes and peppers to 4" pots, maybe to 1-gal pots by late Feb if forecast looks "iffy"
- Propagate herbs from cuttings: thyme, oregano, rosemary
- Trim lemongrass to about 4" high to make room for new growth

Here's the February planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct Flats (indoors, with grow lights and heat mats)

 Tomatoes – late backups, < 70 day varieties (cherry or short season hybrids) 	Basil varietiesHibiscus – roselle type
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Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Feb / Mar)

Kale Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley	ScallionsLettuce and Arugula	 Kohlrabi Spinach, Pak Choy, Swiss Chard
	• Kale	

Direct Seeding in Garden

 Carrots – by mid-Feb 	 Beets and Turnips – by mid-Feb
Daikon Radishes	Salad Radishes
 Scallions (scattered) 	 Sugar Snap Peas – by mid-Feb
 Potatoes – 2nd half Feb 	

Kale, Pak Choy	 Scallions (from flats planted in Jan)
Spinach, Lettuce	Broccoli / Cauliflower
Arugula	Fennel
Winter Herbs	Kohlrabi
Celery / Celeriac	

MARCH

March is the SUPER busiest planting time in our vegetable gardens in this part of Texas! By early March, your beds should be prepared and ready to be planted.

It's fun to get all those springtime seeds and plants in the ground and watch them grow. Although I always target to get my tomatoes planted by mid-March and peppers and eggplants by early-April, every few years we get a late March frost that makes things a bit complicated. Remember that our garden planting timelines are based on average last frost dates; unfortunately, Mother Nature doesn't like to be "average". Keep your eyes on the 2-wk extended forecast before planting tomatoes. Even with frost cloth covering, a light frost can finish off small tomato seedlings.

If you are planning to plant ginger or turmeric, buy your ginger now and start drying it in preparation for planting in early- to mid-April. I suggest buying organic ginger and turmeric to ensure that it hasn't been sprayed with growth regulators (to stop it from sprouting on grocery shelves).

Here's the March planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct Flats (indoors, or in greenhouse)

Okra (late March) – for April	Basil varieties
planting	Hibiscus – roselle type

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Mar / Apr)

Scallions	Kohlrabi
Lettuce and Arugula	Cucumbers
Kale	Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley
Summer/Winter Squash	(or direct sow in garden)

Direct Seeding in Garden

 Potatoes – by mid-Mar 	Salad Radishes
Daikon Radishes	 Beans – (bush and/or pole)
Scallions	Cucumbers
Summer/Winter Squash – late-Mar	

 Tomatoes – target mid-Mar Peppers / Eggplants – late-Mar 	 Late Broccoli / Cauliflower Kale / Chard
ArugulaKohlrabi	 Scallions Hibiscus (roselles) – early seedlings

APRIL

For vegetable gardeners, April is just a continuation from March of the busy spring planting season.

Now that your tomato and pepper plants have gotten a little taller and are about to start growing into their cages, it's time to trim the lower leaves and suckers to make sure the plants have plenty of air circulation near the ground. I try to trim extra suckers and leaves up to about 12-14" above the ground, but it depends on the size of the plants.

In April, you can also continue to plant radishes (direct sow in garden), lettuce, and arugula (in flats) from seed to harvest before it gets too warm in early June.

Many vegetables can be succession planted during the late Spring and Summer. I'll use a different format for these planting seasons.

Here's the April planting plan:

- Summer and/or Winter Squash transplant or direct sow in ground (don't forget floating row cover to
 protect from squash vine borer) see <u>March 13 2021</u> Newsletter for details
- Ginger, Turmeric, and Galangal (see <u>FB video from March 2021</u> or the <u>Planting Instructions</u> page of this website for planting instructions) by end of April
- Okra direct sow or from transplants if you want an early start can succession plant through about August
- Cucumbers succession plant every 4-5 weeks from mid-Mar through Sep you can choose to either direct sow or start in 6-packs and transplant when 4-6" tall
- Melons direct sow or transplant from pots I will plant round 2 in mid-May
- Hibiscus Roselles seeds (in pots) or transplant from pots
- Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplants transplant all by mid-April for best results
- Bush and Pole Beans direct sow in ground
- Jicama transplant seedlings started indoors in December
- Tindora (Ivy Gourd) transplant from pots
- Basils and other summer herbs seeds (in pots), transplant from pots, or propagate from cuttings

MAY

The garden planting plans for May look a lot like those in April... Most of the new seeds or transplants are succession plantings of squash, okra, cucumbers, and summer herbs.

May is when we start seeing the harvest ramp up of the garlic and onions planted in early Winter, the broccoli, cauliflower, and other brassicas planted in late Winter, and the squash, eggplants and cherry tomatoes planted in March/April!

Remember, you can also plant radishes and arugula from seed (by mid-May) to harvest before it gets too warm in June. You can use shade cloth, positioned to protect from the late afternoon sun, to extend this into early July.

Here's the May planting plan:

- Summer Squash direct sow in ground or start from seed indoors
- Okra direct sow or from transplants if you want an early start can succession plant through mid-August
- Cucumbers succession plant every 4-5 weeks from mid-Mar through Sep
- Melons direct sow or transplant from pots round 2 planting
- Hibiscus Roselles transplant from pots
- Tindora (Ivy Gourd) transplant from pots
- Basils and other summer herbs seeds (in pots), transplant from pots, or propagate from cuttings

<u>JUNE</u>

June (and early July) is the peak of tomato harvesting for this area!!! Get those canners ready for making salsa and tomato sauce!

During June, many of the cooler weather plants begin to get stressed by the heat and slow down. When the plants get stressed, for an organic grower, they are more susceptible to pest damage. Here are some of the things I start to do in the garden in June to make room for plants that can handle our HOT summers:

- Kale and Swiss chard remove in mid- to late-June, when it's just too tough to keep the caterpillars, aphids, and flea beetles under control organically
- Strawberry plants remove in mid-June. I leave the ones that I propagate for planting in November (but they have to be watered <u>every</u> day during summer), and remove the ones in blocks around the edges of beds (they have no room to make new plants from runners)
- French filet beans remove late-June (maybe early July if it cools off a little)
- Onions harvest onions in late-May and early-June; harvest garlic when 2/3 of the leaves have turned brown (mid-May to mid-June, depending on weather). Both need to be dried and cured.

Even though it's hot out there, here are the things you can still plant in June.

Here's the June planting plan:

- Malabar Spinach although it is a little slimy, it's a great summer green option. It is an aggressive vine, and needs to be trellised.
- Okra you can succession plant okra as often as you'd like until about mid-August. I start mine in flats and transplant into the ground when it's about 8-10" tall.
- Cucumbers more succession plantings until mid-August. I plant every 30ish days from mid-March through mid-August. If you don't have a lot of bees in your garden, the "seedless" parthenocarpic varieties work best (the flowers have both male and female parts, so don't need bees for pollination). Tasty Jade, Nokya, and Summer Dance are some examples. These hybrids have better flavor and seem to grow better in mid-summer than the heirloom varieties.
- Summer Squash succession plant through late-August
- Long Beans these heat-loving tropical beans do well during summer. Although they get a lot of aphid stress during the heat of August, you can plant them until the end of August.
- Summer Herbs all kinds of basil varieties
- Fall Tomatoes the last week of June is time to plant seeds (indoors with grow lights) for Fall tomatoes. Plan to transplant in the ground in early August. Stick with less than 70-day varieties for the Fall, because you're trying to get ripe tomatoes before the first frost in November(ish).

<u>JULY</u>

There are a few weeks left of quality heirloom tomato harvesting. During the late part of the season, I recommend removing the tomatoes once they show a hint of color and finish ripening them indoors. Here's a link to the <u>July 2, 2022</u> weekly newsletter that explains why you want to ripen tomatoes indoors.

It's plenty HOT out there in July, but the heat-loving plants are still going strong and the last of the spring plants need to be removed from the gardens. Here are the garden activities for July:

- Much of July is spent on garden cleanup, including LOTS of weeding... and more weeding...
- By mid-July, I plan to remove most of the spring-planted heirloom tomatoes, remove the first and second plantings of summer squash, remove bush beans, remove the strawberries planted in concrete block spaces, weed, trim low okra leaves so I can slather on Tree Tanglefoot to keep the fire ants from climbing up the plants and eating the pods, weed, trim the spearmint, weed, weed, weed... LOL.
- By the end of July, I will remove all cherry tomato plants, weed, weed, and more WEED... you get the idea.

Here's the July planting plan:

- Tomato seeds Plant these indoors (in flats or pots) late June or first few weeks of July. When they get 3-4" tall, they can be bumped up to larger pots (I target mid-July for this). Plan for transplanting into the ground in early August. You can also take cuttings to root from spring-planted tomatoes (although l've found these plants aren't as healthy as those from seeds).
- Cucumber seeds I plant these in pots or flats, then transplant into the ground once they form true leaves. Summer germination for seeds directly sowed in the garden is poor for various reasons (fire ants eat them, heat and humidity cause seeds to rot before germination, etc), so I prefer transplanting.
- Radish seeds Direct sow in garden, and use shade cloth to protect them from afternoon sun
- Summer Squash succession planting plant in flats (indoors) and transplant to garden, or direct sow in garden, and cover with floating row cover until first female blossoms form
- Long Bean seeds install trellis ahead of time, and direct sow in the garden
- Okra seeds start in flats and transplant to garden when 6-8" tall 30" spacing in garden
- Miscellaneous (planted in flats) Mouse Melons, Arugula, Scallions, (more) Basils, C<u>u</u>lantro (to transplant in August)

<u>AUGUST</u>

It's August. Although there are a few things we can plant now that can handle late summer heat, most of the work in the gardens is to get them ready for Fall gardening. While weeding, amending, tilling, and rebuilding rows to get ready for cool weather crops, there is still a lot that can be planted in August.

Here's the August planting plan:

Tomato seedlings – Transplant into the ground in the first half of August. If you wait too long, you won't
get ripe tomatoes before our first freeze/frost (usually about mid-Nov). Move your tomato seedlings
outdoors under shade cloth for 4-6 days to acclimate them to the 95-100 deg weather before planting.

Succession Planting

- Cucumber seeds I plant these in pots or flats, then transplant into the ground once they form true leaves. Last planting of season for me is usually mid- to late-Aug.
- Summer Squash direct sow in garden, and cover with floating row cover until first male blossoms form. Last planting late-Aug.
- Long Bean seeds install trellis ahead of time, and direct sow in the garden. The last planting of the season can be as late as Aug 31.
- Okra seeds start in plants and transplant to garden when 6-8" tall 30" spacing in garden. Mid-Aug is the last chance to plant okra.
- Radish seeds Direct sow in garden and use shade cloth to protect them from afternoon sun. Continue to plant through Fall / Winter (but no shade cloth needed by September).

Fall Seed Planting

- Sugar Snap Peas Install trellis, and direct sow seeds in mid-Aug. Fill in any ungerminated seeds by end of Aug. Try the shortest-day variety possible to get some peas before first freeze. I like 'Sugar Sprint' (short day and completely stringless). The Fall crop is "hit or miss" (depending on how hot it is in August and on how early the first freeze occurs), but worth the try if you have room in the garden. The spring planting (Jan/Feb) is more dependable.
- French Filet Beans (or other bush beans) Direct sow in ground mid-Aug. Fill in any ungerminated seeds by end of Aug.
- Mouse melons Direct sow, or plant in pots and transplant into the garden (like cucumbers). Plant these by mid-Aug.
- Rhubarb (grown as an annual here) Plant in flats (INDOORS, under grow lights) by end of Aug. In late Sep, you will bump them up to 3-4" pots. Transplant into the ground sometime in Oct/Nov.
- Misc Fall herbs (dill, parsley, cilantro) try first planting (in flats) in late Aug.

SEPTEMBER

September is the busiest time for the Fall / Winter gardens. This is this time when I reclaim the area where I've been growing watermelons or cantaloupes. It usually involves a combination of string trimmer and lawnmower at the highest setting... LOL.

September is when you start planting lots of seeds indoors under grow lights or in an outdoor covered seedling area (not a greenhouse – too hot during the day). The root crops can be direct sowed in the gardens.

During September and October, I begin rooting herbs from cuttings to keep in the greenhouse over Winter.

Here's the September planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Sep / Oct / Nov)

Broccoli	Cauliflower
Kale	Kohlrabi
 Cabbages (red / green / Napa) 	Swiss Chard
Celery and Celeriac	Spinach
Scallions	 Onions (just in case sets not avail.)
Leeks	Fennel
Lettuce and Arugula	Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley

Direct Seeding in Garden

 Carrots (LOTS of carrots! (20)) 	Beets and Turnips
Daikon Radishes	 Salad Radishes
 Scallions (scattered) 	

Propagating From Cuttings or Roots

• (Dregano	٠	Rosemary
• E	English Thyme	•	African Blue Basil
• (Celeste Fig	•	Itsaul Summer Raspberry

OCTOBER

Much of what is planted in October looks like what was planted in September. The vegetable seeds planted now have to survive some Winter cold fronts with frost coverings and maybe some heat source. Although we have some years with no hard freezes, some people choose to stop gardening during winter because of the unexpected timing of deep freezes which can wipe out even the very cold hardy plants.

Happy October gardening!

Here's the October planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Oct / Nov)

Broccoli	Cauliflower
Kale	Kohlrabi
 Cabbages (red / green / Napa) 	Swiss Chard
Celery and Celeriac	Spinach
Scallions	 Onions (just in case sets not avail.)
Leeks	Fennel
Lettuce and Arugula	Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley

Direct Seeding in Garden

Carrots	Beets and Turnips
Daikon Radishes	Salad Radishes
 Scallions (scattered) 	

Propagating From Cuttings (by mid-Oct) – last chance before potential freeze

Oregano	Rosemary
English Thyme	African Blue Basil
Celeste Fig	Itsaul Summer Raspberry

Other

- Prepare strawberry planting areas for early November transplants
- Transplant rhubarb to gardens late in the month protect from freezes

NOVEMBER

During November, most of the things planted fall into three categories: 1. root crops (carrots, beets, radishes, etc.), 2. cabbage family (broccoli, kohlrabi, cauliflower, etc.), and 3. winter greens (kale, chard, spinach, lettuce, etc.). And, of course, November is when you can plant onion sets and seed garlic cloves.

Unless the seedlings are very young, most of these plants can handle light freezes during the winter. However, if we get another freeze like we had in February 2021 (single digit low temps) or December 2022 (mid-teens low temps), all bets are off.

Cooler temperatures and shorter days in November and December mean the plants grow more slowly, so there is less to harvest from the gardens. This is usually when I get caught up on sorting wood chips and other garden projects.

You can start seedlings in flats either indoors (with grow lights) or outdoors but be sure to move them inside during freezing weather.

A QUICK COMMENT ABOUT WINTER GARDENING IN THIS AREA

If you plant a Winter garden, you need to be mentally prepared to lose most of the crops when we get deep freezes. These can occur anytime from mid-December through late February. Frost cloths (even heavy linen/canvas types or double layers) can only keep a limited amount of ground heat around the plants.

Here's the November planting plan:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Nov / Dec)

Scallions	 Kohlrabi
 Lettuce and Arugula 	Spinach
Fennel	 Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley

Direct Seeding in Garden

٠	Carrots – by mid-month	•	Beets and Turnips
٠	Daikon Radishes	•	Salad Radishes
٠	Scallions (scattered)		

Kale	 Scallions (from flats planted in Oct)
Broccoli	Salad Radishes
 Spinach, Lettuce, Arugula 	 Strawberry crowns or transplants
Onion sets	Rhubarb
Garlic cloves	

DECEMBER

Garden activities in December look a lot like those of November. Many of the cabbage family plants, winter greens, and root vegetables can still be planted in December (although they may need some protection from light freezes when the plants are small, or lots of protection from hard freezes).

December is also the last chance to get your strawberries, rhubarb transplants, celery seedlings, onions, and garlic planted <u>for the best yields</u>. Late December is also when you start your pepper, eggplant, and some long-season heirloom tomato seeds (for grafting). These will be sowed indoors under grow lights and on heat mats.

Here are my gardening plans for December:

Planting Seeds in 50-ct or 72-ct Flats (for transplant to garden in Dec / Jan)

Scallions	Kohlrabi
Lettuce and Arugula	Spinach, Pak Choy
Fennel	 Winter Herbs: Dill, Cilantro, Parsley

Planting Seeds in 50-ct Flats (indoors, with grow lights and heat mats)

 Tomatoes – heirlooms to be grafted (late-month) Note: Plant tomato seeds for non- grafted plants in early Jan 	 Eggplant – late-month Peppers – late-month

Direct Seeding in Garden

Carrots – late-month	 Beets and Turnips
Daikon Radishes	Salad Radishes
 Scallions (scattered) 	

•	Kale, Pak Choy	 Scallions (from flats planted in Nov)
•	Broccoli / Cauliflower	 Strawberry crowns or transplants
•	Spinach, Lettuce, Arugula	Rhubarb
•	Onion sets	 Celery (if not done in Nov)
•	Garlic cloves	Fennel

GENERAL NOTES

- This planting schedule was developed from Rain Song Farm TX garden journals that we've documented during a 16-year period (from early 2006 through early 2023). The timing / schedule is based on the cooler weather in the Magnolia, TX area. The schedule will need to be slightly adjusted for locations nearer downtown Houston, TX.
- 2. This planting schedule does not include some large crops that require large acreage to grow, but includes most vegetable crops that local homeowners can grow in urban or suburban raised bed gardens.
- 3. Due to unpredictable weather, Rain Song Farm TX assume no liability for crop loss / damage from following this schedule.