

In The Dirt: December NC

December in the NC Piedmont/Foothills is essentially the dormant season — no direct-seeding of vegetables happens outdoors this month. It's the quietest month in the garden calendar.

Direct-seeding: basically none

- Ground is too cold and days too short for germination of anything you'd grow for harvest. Skip seeding vegetables this month.

One exception — cover crops, if you missed November:

- Winter rye can still be seeded in very early December in a mild spell, though it's pushing the limit. Germination will be slow and thin compared to a November planting.

What actually happens in December:

- Bare-root planting — this is a strong month (alongside Nov–Feb) for planting dormant fruit trees, berry bushes, and other perennials, since the plant isn't actively growing and transplant shock is minimal.
- Mulching — heavy mulch on garlic beds and any overwintering greens (spinach, kale) helps protect roots from freeze-thaw cycles.
- Protecting overwintering crops — row cover or cold frames on anything still in the ground (spinach, kale, collards, garlic) if hard freezes are forecast.
- Tool care and bed planning — cleaning/sharpening tools, ordering seed catalogs, mapping out next year's rotation.
- Indoor seed starting prep — not outdoor seeding, but late December is when some gardeners start planning their seed-starting calendar for late winter/early spring (onions and some brassicas often start indoors in January).

Practical note: December is a natural "rest and reflect" month for programming — a seed-catalog planning session, since there's little hands-on planting to offer.