

# January 2021 Gardener's Corner

*By Cate White, San Joaquin County Master Gardener*

January is traditionally the time of new beginnings. Of course, we all fervently hope that this year will be better than the last. So, as we shelter inside during this cold, damp and hopefully wet month, perusing new seed catalogs and planning this year's vegetable garden is a fun and positive way to begin the new year.

When we think of vegetable gardens, we often think about warm season crops such as tomatoes, peppers, beans, corn and squash. However, many vegetables grow best in cooler Spring and Fall temperatures, and they should not be overlooked. The next few months are prime times for planting these tasty and nutritious vegetables that can also be very easy to grow.

The first thing to consider when planning your vegetable garden is whether or not the soil is ready to work. To prevent wet soil from forming large, hard clumps, do the squeeze test. If a handful of soil easily crumbles after being squeezed together, it is ready to work. If it stays in a tight lump, it is too wet, and you will need to wait until it dries out a bit. Manteca soil is mostly sandy loam, so is not as prone to clumping as the adobe soil found throughout much of California. Working in a good quantity of compost helps to loosen adobe soil, and also helps sandy soil hold moisture better.

The next thing to consider is how much sun your garden space will get. For best growth, vegetables need about 8 hours of sun each day, so be aware of trees, shrubs, walls or fences that may cast shade on your garden area. Your vegetable plot should also be located in near a convenient source of water.

You may decide to build raised beds for vegetable gardening. These can make accessing your garden easier, and many plans or kits are available. For best results, fill your beds with soil meant for raised beds, not with regular garden soil. Installing a good irrigation system will also make growing your vegetables easier.

Now that you've picked a good spot and gotten the area ready, it's time to begin planting. Peas, parsley, lettuce, mustard and radishes can be planted from seed as early as January. Most of these, excluding radishes which grow quickly from seed, can also be planted as young plant starts, and can be planted through March. Radishes and mustard can be planted



*Radishes  
Open Source*



*Red Chard  
Open Source*

through April. Asparagus rhizomes can be planted in January, and white potatoes can be planted as slips from January to March. Note that asparagus, a long-lived perennial, should not be harvested in the first year of growth. Starting in February, beets, fava beans, swiss chard, collards, kale, kohlrabi, chives, spinach and turnips can all be planted from seed. Broccoli, swiss chard, chives, collards, kale, leeks and spinach can also be planted as starts. All these can be planted through March, except broccoli and beets. Broccoli is best planted as starts only in February, and beets can be planted from seed through April. Carrot seeds should be planted March through May, and celery can be planted as seeds or starts in March and April. All of these plants can take some frost, so won't need extra protection.



*Carrots  
Open Source*

So, as you can see, the selection of cool season vegetables is even greater than the warm season ones. Pick some of your favorites and start planning and planting for some great spring veggies!

### **January Garden Checklist**

- Plant bare-root shrubs, trees and roses.
- Apply a second dose of fungicide to peaches and nectarines to control leaf curl. (The first dose should be around Christmas or New Year's Day.)
- Prune deciduous trees and shrubs (such as apple, pear, crepe myrtle, roses and stone fruits), encouraging good form and structure. Remove dead, diseased and borer infested wood, then spray with horticultural oil (found in most nurseries) to discourage over-wintering pests and diseases.
- Continue monitoring and baiting for snails, slugs and ants. Snail bait that is iron-based is safer around pets.
- Adjust watering schedules according to weather. Remember not to water within 48 hours of measurable rain. If you have plants growing under eaves and in entryways where they do not get rain, water occasionally by hand.
- Protect sensitive plants from frost with covers or by bringing under shelter.