

Year Round Gardening Tips for Your Region

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Achieve year-round gardening success in your climate by following this expert advice on selecting crops and varieties, overwintering cold-hardy vegetables, and practicing season extension techniques, such as using cold frames and row cover to protect plants from frost.

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Whether you live in a chilly, short-season spot or a warm climate, you, too, can break through seasonal gardening barriers to harvest fresh produce all year

Fall frost doesn't have to spell the end of garden-fresh eating. By choosing the right crops and varieties, as well as implementing some season extension strategies, you can push the seasonal envelope much further than you might have imagined. In fact, gardeners in every region of the United States can enjoy year-round gardening, and eat fresh foods from the garden in every season. We talked with 11 of the most adventurous and successful gardeners we know from coast to coast to learn their top tactics for stretching the growing season to its max (see where each of the experts lives on this Zone map). Try tips from in or near your Hardiness Zone or your region to help set you on your way toward eating from the garden year-round!

Year-Round Gardening in the Pacific Coast

1. Salt Spring Island, British Columbia (Zone 8). Linda Gilkeson, entomologist and author of *Backyard Bounty*, overwinters frost-tolerant varieties of kale, carrots, beets, leeks, purple sprouting broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts, as well as many other healthful greens. "They're all still going full-tilt come March," she says. From late February into May, cold-hardy cauliflower ('Aalsmeer,' 'Galleon' and 'Purple Cape') and broccoli ('Cardinal,' 'Red Spear' and 'White Star') produce crops from seed sown in late June to early July the previous year.

"Celeriac, grown for its flavorful roots, is a midwinter delight. Just leave it in the garden, well-mulched," Gilkeson advises. You can do the same with carrots and beets. For your leafy greens, keep a sheet of heavy

plastic on hand, which you can prop aloft above your beds with stakes or low hoops to provide protection from Arctic blasts.

2. Corvallis, Ore. (Zone 8). Carol Deppe, plant breeder and author of *The Resilient Gardener* and *The Tao of Vegetable Gardening*, overwinters many crops, including kale, beets, purple sprouting broccoli and edible-podded peas. But her favorite way to eat from the garden year-round is to pack her pantry with reliable storage crops, such as homegrown grain corn, dried beans and winter squash. For polenta and cornbread, Deppe likes ‘Cascade Ruby-Gold’ flint corn, an early maturing, cold-hardy variety she developed. She recommends ‘Magic Manna’ flour corn for cakes, pancakes, sweet breads and parching. A quality coffee grinder or blender can grind flour corns into a fine flour similar to wheat flour in texture. Deppe’s favorite dry beans for her area are ‘Gaucho’ bush (an Argentine heirloom) and ‘Black Coco.’ She suggests timing the plantings so the pods can dry on the mature plants in late August, before fall rains.

Her favorite winter squash for the Northwest is ‘Sweet Meat — Oregon Homestead,’ which produces sweet, dry, flavorful fruits weighing up to 25 pounds. She also grows and stores ‘Candystick Dessert Delicata,’ ‘Delicata Zeppelin’ and ‘Honey Boat’ winter squash. All produce small, striped fruits with fine-grained, sweet, dry flesh, and will keep through late December. The fruits of ‘Candystick Dessert Delicata’ can weigh up to 3 pounds and have thick flesh with a flavor reminiscent of a Medjool date. Winter squash generally bear large fruits that keep well and become more flavorful in storage. “Let them cure while you’re eating up your fall veggies, and then eat your long-keeping ***Cucurbita maxima*** and even-longer-keeping ***C. moschata*** varieties,” Deppe says.

Just as some Native American tribes did, she slices and dries summer squash for winter use, too. Through extensive testing, she found 'Costata Romanesco' and any gold zucchini best for both eating fresh and drying. Just cut 3/8-inch slices of 1- to 3-pound fruits that have tender skins and small, immature seeds. Although she dries squash on a rack modeled on one that native tribes used, you can employ a food dehydrator set at 125 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. The whole dried slices reconstitute in soup when cooked for about 45 minutes; chop up the dried slices first for faster cooking.

3. Palo Alto, Calif. (Zone 9). In her coastal garden, Rosalind Creasy, author of *Edible Landscaping* and many other books, grows peas, scallions, onions, lettuce, kale, radishes, cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, Asian and mustard greens, chard, beets, parsnips, carrots, fava beans, and wheat through winter. Beets and chard planted in late October have the added advantage of avoiding the leaf miners that often plague these crops in summer. The cooler temperatures are also ideal for cilantro. "Most people try to plant cilantro in summer, but it bolts," she says. "If you plant it in September, it will produce through winter and flower in March, attracting beneficial insects to the garden." She rarely needs cloches or row covers for frost protection. "To protect my frost-sensitive citrus trees, I hang old-fashioned white Christmas lights in the trees. They give off just enough heat to prevent the trees from freezing and look very pretty."

Creasy preserves her garden's summer flavors in her signature minestrone soup and her apple, tomato, marinara and ranchero sauces, which she freezes for winter use. Her frozen treasure trove also contains savory roasted tomatoes, herbs in olive oil, blackberries

lightly dusted with sugar, chopped basil layered with Parmesan cheese, and lime juice cubes.

Year-Round Gardening in the Southwest

4. Cornville, Ariz. (Zone 8). Native American corn and bean varieties are ideally suited to the hot, dry conditions of the Southwest, says Bill McDorman, who currently runs the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance, but was formerly with Seeds Trust, which was headquartered in Arizona for several years. Many varieties McDorman grows and recommends have been selected over many generations for their ability to thrive in the region's harsh environment. He harvests grain corn into November, and then stores it for use through winter and early spring. He recommends 'Rio Grande Blue,' a flour corn that's ideal for tortillas. "Dry the corn on the stalk before you pick it. If it isn't completely dry, peel back the husks to let it finish drying," he suggests. "Don't shell the kernels from the cobs until you're ready to use them. That's the secret — it makes an altogether different food from what you'd get at the store."

'Candy Mountain,' an early, open-pollinated variety with rich flavor, is his favorite sweet corn. Its strong emergence in cool soil and its early season vigor makes it a standout for the Southwest and many other high-altitude locales. Among beans, McDorman favors what are now known as "Anasazi" — a type of bean believed to have originated from seed found in a clay pot among ancient ruins of ancestral Pueblo people. "The beans store for up to 10 years, cook relatively quickly, and have a creamy texture and rich flavor," he says. He also considers tepary beans (***Phaseolus acutifolius***) a regional gem. Native groups in Arizona and northwestern Mexico grew and selected these beans

to thrive there. Tepary beans need a short season (60 to 80 days) and are drought-tolerant.

McDorman harvests fresh Jerusalem artichokes, oregano and garlic through winter. Plus, he's never without greens: "Wild mustard grows in the shade of mesquite trees everywhere around this part of the Southwest. So, I plant 'Slow Bolt' arugula, a relative of mustard, near mesquite. I get an unlimited supply of fresh greens for several years without replanting."

Year-Round Gardening in the North

5. Ketchum, Idaho (Zone 5). Bill McDorman is also well-acquainted with the extremely cold, short growing season of the North. He co-founded the Rocky Mountain Seed Alliance in Ketchum, Idaho, to help meet the needs of gardeners dealing with that region's challenges. He suggests starting seeds indoors, and also taking advantage of warm microclimates, such as an area at the south side of a building with a concrete foundation. Try adding rocks to garden beds to increase thermal mass. "Or, site the garden on a south-facing slope," he says. "The soil will start to warm about three weeks earlier in spring."

Gardeners in this climate can grow kale and Brussels sprouts well into fall and early winter if snow cover is good, he says. 'Dwarf Siberian' kale, selected to stay low under the protection of snow, is a favorite. He also notes that many gardeners plant crops relatively late in the year and try to get them to mature as temps are dropping, which is rarely successful. Instead, focus on planting in time for crops to mature right before the first fall frost, and then use protection devices to keep them going.

To give corn a two- to three-week head start in spring, McDorman says, sow the seeds in the bottom of a 1-foot-deep trench, cover them with a couple of inches of soil, and then roll plastic over the top to trap the heat and moisture. When the corn reaches the plastic, around your last spring frost date, remove the plastic and fill in soil around the growing plants.

McDorman also urges gardeners in cold, short-season areas to grow Siberian tomatoes. In 1989, he collected seeds of 60 Siberian varieties that are now world-famous for their hardiness and flavor. “They were selected for the very best flavor by the gardeners who grew them and then traded the seeds,” he says. All are cold-hardy, but many tolerate hot temperatures, too. ‘Mikarda Sweet’ and ‘De Barrao’ are good Roma types for storage. And because all the Siberian tomato varieties are open-pollinated, you can save your own seeds and develop the best strains for your microclimate.

6. Waterville, Maine (Zone 5). Fedco Seeds horticulturist Roberta Bailey harvests brassicas, carrots, beets, cilantro and spinach well after her first frost, using high tunnels and row covers. ‘White Russian’ kale has held in an unheated greenhouse all the way down to zero degrees, and survived in the garden until January beneath insulating snow. Gardeners in the area can also grow ‘Vates’ collards, ‘Green Lance’ gai lan (a Chinese kale used like broccoli), and yokatta-na (an extra-hardy Asian green similar to bok choy) beneath row covers. “If snow cover is constant, ‘Kolibri’ kohlrabi, parsnips and horseradish will survive winter, too,” Bailey says.

Year-Round Gardening in the Midwest

7. Mansfield, Mo. (Zone 6). The Midwestern area has a longer growing season than its northern neighbors, but frost-free dates can vary widely from year to year. The growers at Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co. use row covers, cloches and cold frames to protect cabbage, lettuce and other greens from damage in spring and fall. They recommend ‘Wong Bok’ Chinese cabbage, as well as the heading cabbages ‘Early Jersey Wakefield,’ ‘Red Express,’ ‘Cour di Bue’ and ‘Late Flat Dutch.’ Tatsoi, bok choy, collards, arugula and ‘Giant Red Japanese’ mustard also thrive.

“For storage, try ‘Pusa Asita Black’ and ‘Atomic Red’ carrots, and ‘Chioggia’ and ‘Golden’ beets,” says spokesperson Kathy McFarland. “Also, ‘Blue Hubbard,’ ‘Galeux d’Eysines,’ ‘Mini Red Turban’ and ‘Moranga’ (also called ‘Pink Pumpkin’) squash will keep all winter long.”

Year-Round Gardening in the Mid-Atlantic

8. Devon, Pa. (Zone 7). Contributing Editor William Woys Weaver grows mustard, lettuce, and celeriac beneath tunnels covered with greenhouse-grade plastic. He says the key to overwintering vegetables is to plant early enough for the crops to develop a good root system. If planted by early September, lettuces will develop sufficient roots so they can survive winter and, by early April, will be growing strong again.

Turnips, parsnips, winter radishes and ‘Green Glaze’ collards have proven exceptionally hardy, easily surviving winter without protection. Weaver grows several less-familiar edibles in large tubs inside an unheated greenhouse in fall and winter. Oca, an Andean vegetable, produces a bumper crop of brightly colored, waxy tubers by mid-

January. Yacon, a Jerusalem artichoke relative also native to the Andes, produces crunchy, sweet, nutritious tubers. Weaver also overwinters the South American litchi tomato in tubs inside his greenhouse, and then replants them in his garden when the weather warms in spring.

9. Warrenton, Va. (Zone 7). Homesteader and author Harvey Ussery is wild about chicories for cold-weather salads: “There’s a huge diversity of types — escarole, endive, radicchio and sugar loaf — and they bear beautiful leaves of pink, rose, salmon, green and white. They’re much better than a lettuce salad, to my taste.”

Most brassicas don’t appreciate the area’s hot, late summers, although ‘Vates’ kale, a few Asian greens, and turnips are dependable exceptions. Instead, Ussery focuses on growing fall and winter storage crops. Dense-fleshed root crops, such as carrots, turnips, rutabagas and beets, keep best (and stay sweetest) right where they grew, beneath a thick layer of clean straw or leaves. Just kick aside the snow and mulch to dig your crops.

A “clamp” is another easy winter storage method for rutabagas, turnips and cabbages, Ussery says. In fall, dig a hole below the frost line, put in your unwashed vegetables, and cover: “I make my clamp 2 feet deep. I cover it with 2-by-4s, a sheet of plastic, and a couple of straw bales.” This old-fashioned method maintains a high humidity level, so the veggies will stay crisp.

Indoors, Ussery stores winter squash, dried corn, peanuts, onions, garlic, potatoes and sweet potatoes. “The queens of storage squash are the **C. moschata** varieties. I especially like ‘Seminole,’ which has an incredible ability to last, and resists squash vine borers.” He also

highly recommends 'Tennessee Red Valencia' peanuts, which tolerate clay soil. After harvest, he cures the peanuts for about a month in an airy place, and then stores them through winter. "We roast small batches for about a half-hour, shell and eat — delicious."

10. Floyd, Va. (Zone 6). Author and expert organic gardener Barbara Pleasant grows spinach and parsley inside a glass-topped cold frame through winter, and overwinters onions and ever-bearing strawberries beneath row cover supported by sturdy wire cages. To encourage strong germination of radishes, beets and carrots in cool spring soils, she lays row cover directly over a seeded bed at ground level, just until the crop germinates. She then installs the cover over hoops so the tiny seedlings don't have to bear the weight of the cover. For storage, Pleasant succeeds with dry beans, pumpkins, winter squash, potatoes and sweet potatoes. She especially likes 'Dickinson' pumpkins. Instead of growing storage onions, she says local gardeners should try shallots, which are often easier to grow and superior keepers.

Year-Round Gardening in the Tropical South

11. Homestead, Fla. (Zone 10). "Don't mistake this as the southern United States," says Andres Mejides, gardening instructor and owner of Elfin Acres organic farm. "It's the northern Caribbean!" Gardeners here can simply walk out their back doors and gather whatever happens to be ripe, year-round. "What it boils down to is the topsy-turvy nature of when to plant," he says. "Winter is for crops that gardener in other regions would grow in summer. We can start tomatoes and peppers in late summer, and then proceed through December with cool-weather crops, such as broccoli."

Mejides notes that, without an extended cool season, getting a good crop of peas is difficult. He suggests growing perennial pigeon peas instead. He also advises waiting until the rainy season ends in mid-October to plant cucumbers and squash, to reduce the chance of foliar diseases. When the weather warms in spring, switch to crops common in the tropics, including chayote squash, okra, malanga (a starchy root vegetable), yuca root, boniato and tropical fruits.

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