



SOME CROPS, VARIETIES, & TIMING FOR THE SECRET SEASON (JANUARY THROUGH MARCH)

Artichoke: Plant roots or plants of 'Green Globe' Jan or Feb, or start seeds of 'Imperial Star' indoors on November 1 to plant out in 8-12 weeks.

Arugula: Sow directly in garden Jan-Mar. Cut young and resow every few weeks, or let mature and cut leaves.

Beets: Sow inside in Dec, plant out Feb, or sow directly, usually by Feb. Try 'Bull's Blood' which has red leaves.

Broccoli: Sow inside at end of Dec, plant out in 5-7 weeks, mid-Feb w. coastal influence, Feb-Mar inland. Use early varieties that are recommended for "spring planting" such as 'De Cicco' or 'Calabrese'.

Broccoli, Chinese: Sow seed inside at end of Dec, plant out in 5-7 weeks, as for broccoli. Also try new hybrids with Western broccoli such as 'Happy Rich' or 'Apollo'.

Cabbage: Sow inside in Nov or Dec to plant out 5-7 weeks later. Use early varieties, including mini-heads

Carrot or Parsnips: Sow outside, in place, Feb or as early as Jan. Use short carrot varieties in clay soil.

Cauliflower--Sow inside in Dec, plant out in 5-7 weeks. Time as for broccoli.

Cilantro: Sow outside in mid-Jan and every two weeks all season.

Chard: Sow inside in late Dec, plant out Feb, or sow directly outside in mid February

Collards, Kale: Sow inside in Dec, set out in 5-7 weeks, in Mid-Jan or in Feb, or set plants outside in Jan or Feb.

Fava bean: Sow directly in the garden. Feb always good, Jan often OK, esp. near coast & Bay.

Florence fennel: Sow inside in Dec, plant out Feb, or sow directly in garden in Feb. Use varieties recommended for spring planting, such as 'Perfection' or 'Zefa Fino'

Garlic: Best planted in October, but if you didn't, you can still plant garlic sets in February.

Leek: Sow inside as early as Nov to plant out in 12 weeks, or plant seeds or seedlings outside Jan-April.

Lettuce: Sow seed inside in Nov or Dec and plant out Jan or Feb. Use varieties described as cold-hardy. Loose leaf and some romaines usually handle cold best. Bibb or butterhead are usually the worst. By Mar, or sometimes even Feb, you should be able to set out plants of all varieties, including heading types.

Mustard: Sow directly in garden by Feb, sometimes Jan. Try 'Mizuna' or 'Ruby Streaks' for salad use.

Onions: Sow seed inside in Oct or Nov to plant out in Jan-Feb, or sow directly in garden Jan-Feb. Use intermediate daylength varieties or new day-neutral ones. Or plant sets directly in garden in Jan-Mar.

Parsley: Sow indoors in Dec to plant out in Feb, or set out plants in the garden in Feb.

Peas: Sow seed of all kinds outside in February. Try snap peas for a high-value crop that's fun to grow.

Potato: Best plant time usually mid Feb. Plant deep, cover if frost comes after shoots emerge.

Radicchio or escarole: Sow inside in Dec to plant out Jan or Feb. Or sow directly in garden in Jan or Feb. Select radicchio varieties said to tolerate spring planting, such as 'Indigo'

Radish & turnips: Sow a few seeds in Jan, then biweekly all season. Root maggots often interfere by late Mar.

Spinach: Sow inside in Dec to plant out in Jan or Feb or sow directly Jan or Feb. For biggest harvest, use varieties said to grow into large plants. Examples are 'Oriental Giant' or 'Giant Winter'

Topics Useful for Year-Round Gardeners in the Bay Area

Hardiness of Cool Season Vegetable Crops

(Some information is from Binda Colebrook's *Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest*)

****Very hardy:** May live through frosts as low as 0°F.

leeks, spinach, late Brussels sprouts, overwintering varieties of broccoli, savoy, red and overwintering varieties of green cabbage, overwintering cauliflower varieties, collards, kale, parsnip, Swiss chard, turnip, parsley, sage, thyme, sorrel.

****Hardy:** Mostly go through frosts of 10°F.

summer broccoli, early Brussels sprouts, spring cabbage varieties, early cauliflower varieties, Chinese cabbage, radish, mustard, broccoli raab, fava beans, beets, carrots, celeriac, Florence fennel, lettuce, chervil, cilantro, rosemary.

****Half-hardy:** Dies at freezing, or at most below 18°F. Kohlrabi.

****Not hardy to frost:**

Peas are best at 50-64°F, minimum of 45°F, damaged by hard frost (but in my experience, have not shown frost damage in a light frost.)

Potatoes are best at 60-65°F, and the tops are damaged by frost. I often start them in February, after frost danger is past but while it is still quite cold, and they thrive.

Year-Round Gardening and Biennial Crops

Biennial crops for winter harvest must be planted early enough in the year that they can mature before the period of maximum winter cold (December and January), since a period of weather below 45°F will stimulate them to bloom, and in most cases, we want to eat the plant before it can bloom. Biennial crops include carrots, beets, chard, fennel, parsnip, celeriac, kale, and leeks. Some heirloom varieties of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower are also biennials. The amount of time these crops need in order to mature before the cold weather sets in varies, depending on how fast they grow and whether they can continue to grow once weather turns cold.

For example, carrots will grow and form roots only when the weather is still warm. They need an average of 3 months to mature. In San Francisco, I plant them by mid-July for a fall/winter harvest. Inland, where late summer temperatures are warmer, they can be planted in August, or even later. Whenever they are planted, they will stop growing in the winter, but you can still dig and eat them till they flower in spring. When they flower, the root will become hard and shriveled. (I always let one plant bloom, because they are excellent attractors of beneficial insects.)

As another example, leeks mature very slowly. The best time to plant them is early spring, so they can become large by the following autumn. You can eat them while they are still small, but they reach the size of commercial leeks by about September. They hold in the ground and may get a bit larger over winter, but you must eat them by the following March, or they flower, developing a tough core and eventually becoming completely tough.

Or suppose you want to grow kale or collards for winter harvest. They continue to grow through winter, but more slowly than when it is warmer. Planted too late in autumn, the plants stay small. All of the plants will bloom in about March, which marks a decline in leaf production, so you may as well plant earlier and get more to harvest before they bloom. (But here is a tip—stems of collard flower buds are delicious. Snap them off a few inches long and use like broccoli raab or gai lan. The harvest will continue several months in spring if you harvest before flowers open and prune the plant back a couple of times.)

Biennial crops planted in January-March usually do not flower in their first year, but occasional onions, leeks, parsley or other biennial crops will accumulate enough chill in late winter to bloom later in spring.

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For more on gardening year-round in the greater bay area, see my book *Golden Gate Gardening: Third Edition*, Sasquatch Books, 2010. It includes vegetables, herbs, fruits, edible flowers, soils, watering, and pest management, recipes, and learning to eat from a garden. The Third Edition includes calendars for inland as well as coastal locations. (They are on pages 388-389.) Pam's column appears in the Food + Wine section of the SF Chronicle one Sunday a month. You can find many of my Chronicle columns at sfgate.com through a search for Pam Peirce

My website, pampeirce.com provides a link to my blog, goldengategarden.typepad.com, which includes much useful information for regional gardeners. There are photos, pest management plans, and recipes on the blog.