



USDA ZONE 7A FALL PLANTING GUIDE

*Your Complete Guide to Fall Gardening in
Zones with First Frosts by Late October*



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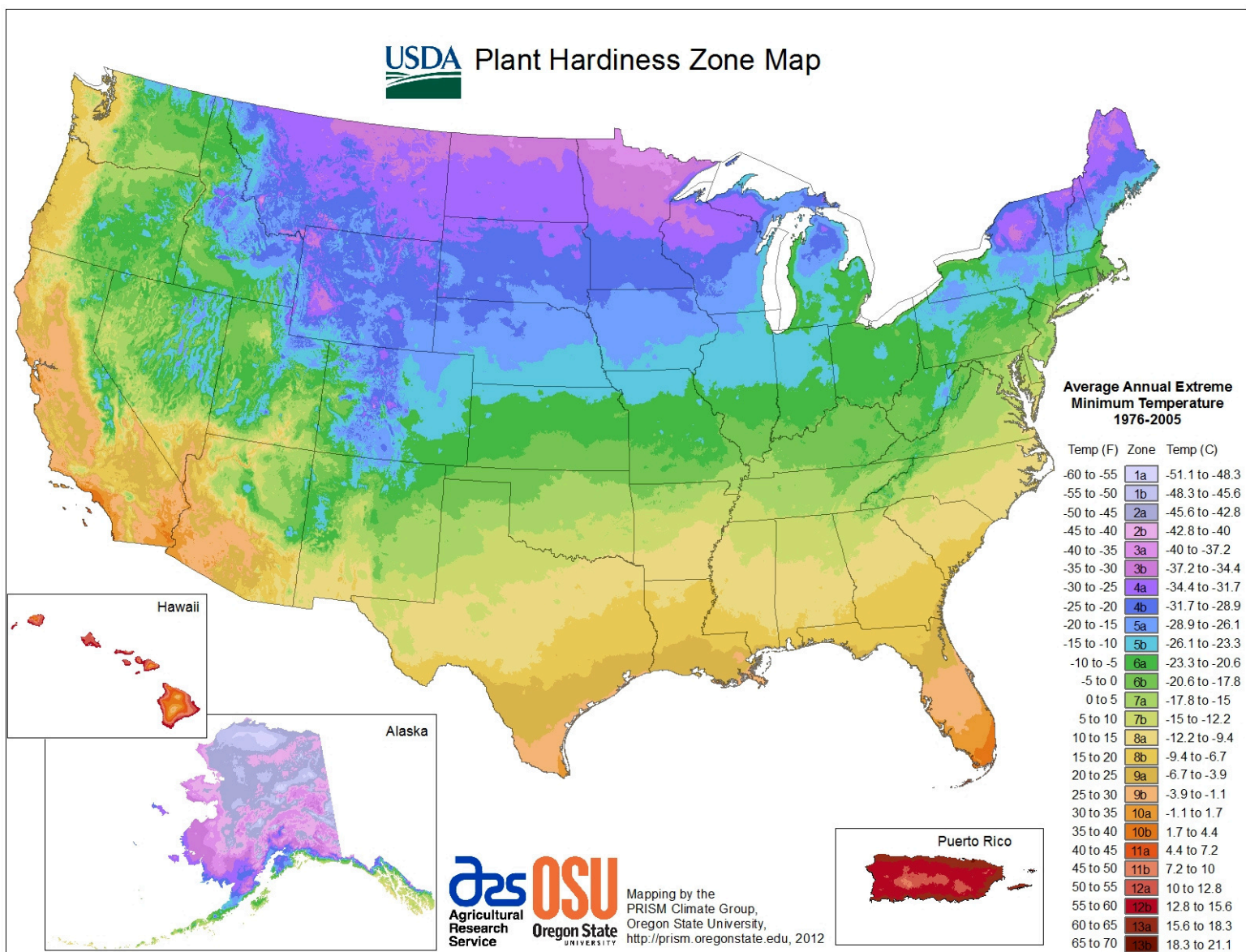
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WELCOME TO FALL GARDENING IN ZONE 7A

Fall gardening in Zone 7a is a smart, productive way to extend your growing season and set yourself up for spring success. With average winter lows between 0°F and 5°F timing your planting and protecting your garden is key.

If you live in USDA Zone 7a, you're gardening in a region with a moderate to long growing season, where the average frost-free period stretches from early May until late September. This generous window makes fall an ideal time to extend your harvest, refresh your beds, and prepare for a productive spring. Zone 7a covers parts of several U.S. states, including northern Texas, Arkansas, and much of Tennessee, as well as northern portions of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. It also includes southern Oklahoma, western North Carolina, and extends through Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and the Washington, D.C. area.



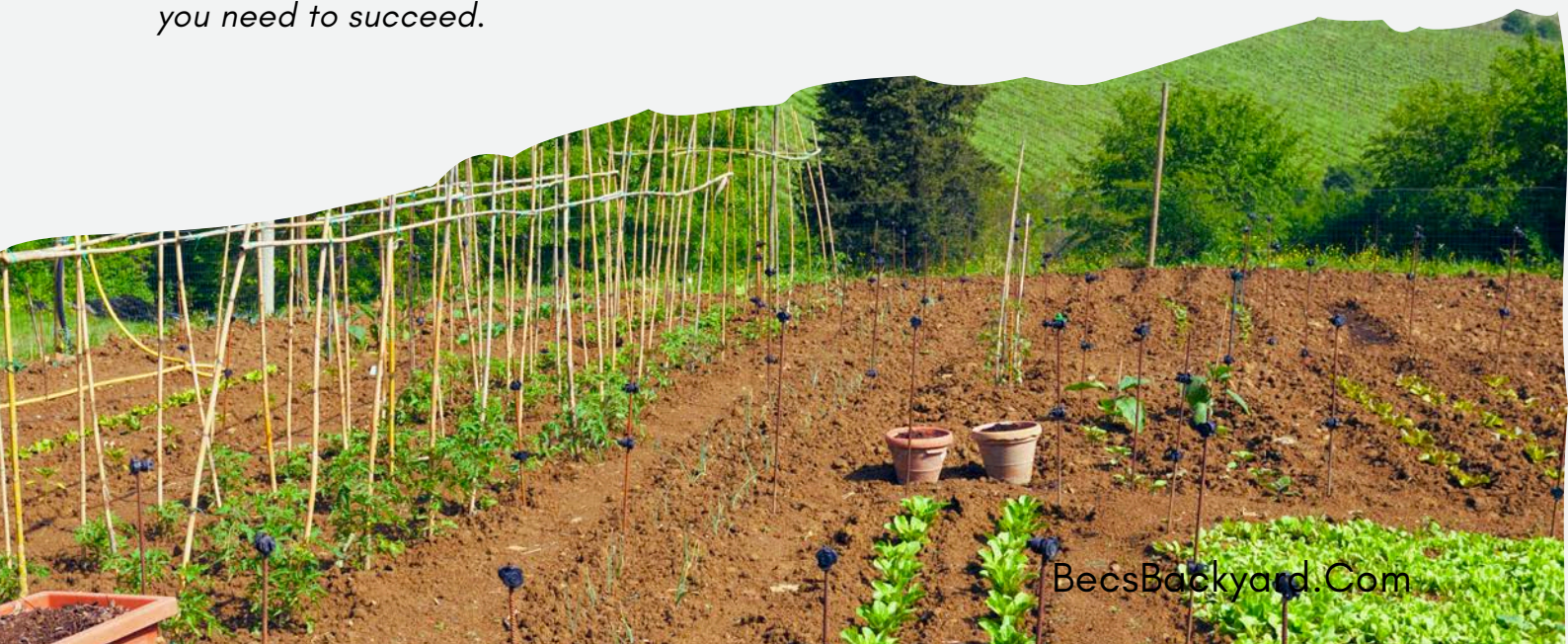
MORE ABOUT GARDENING IN ZONE 7A

Zone 7a is especially rewarding for growing cool-season vegetables in the fall. Leafy greens like spinach, kale, and lettuce thrive in the mild autumn temperatures, while root crops such as carrots, radishes, and turnips benefit from the cooling soil, often becoming sweeter as the season progresses. Garlic and onion sets planted in fall will establish strong roots before winter and deliver abundant harvests the following year. With the right timing and a little frost protection, fall gardens in this zone can remain productive well into November.

Gardeners in Zone 7a can also enjoy growing a wide variety of perennials and spring-blooming bulbs that establish well in fall. Plants like coneflowers, daffodils, crocus, hostas, lilies, hyacinths, and tulips thrive in this climate, rewarding the effort with colorful displays in the following season. Whether you're working with an established landscape or starting fresh, choosing plants suited to your zone gives them the best chance to flourish.

It's also worth noting that even within your own garden, growing conditions can vary. These microclimates—created by sunlight, wind exposure, soil type, elevation, and moisture—can influence how well certain plants perform. A sunny patch against a fence, a shaded area under a tree, or a damp corner that holds water all create distinct zones that suit different plant types. As you spend more time in your garden, you'll begin to notice these variations and can use them to your advantage. With time, selecting the right plants for your space will become second nature.

Whether you're growing leafy greens, planting bulbs, or prepping beds with compost and cover crops, this guide walks you through everything you need to succeed.





WHAT TO PLANT IN FALL

Top Fall Crops and How to Grow Them

Fall in Zone 7a offers a generous second season for gardening, giving growers the opportunity to enjoy a fresh harvest of nutrient-rich vegetables and prepare their soil for the year ahead. As the intense heat of summer fades, cooler temperatures create ideal conditions for many crops that either struggle in warm weather or grow sweeter as the air turns crisp. With the first frost typically arriving in late October or early November, there's still plenty of time to make the most of your garden by selecting the right crops and planting them at the right time.

Cool-season greens like spinach, lettuce, and kale thrive in autumn's milder temperatures. Spinach and lettuce can be sown every couple of weeks for a continuous harvest, while kale's flavor actually improves after a light frost. These crops not only grow quickly but also make excellent use of beds that may have been left bare after summer vegetables have finished. Root vegetables such as carrots, radishes, and turnips are equally well-suited to fall planting. Carrots can be left in the ground and mulched for winter harvest, while radishes mature in as little as a month, making them a great choice for gardeners getting a late start.

MORE ON WHAT TO PLANT IN ZONE 7A

Fall is also the time to plant garlic and onion sets. These hardy crops won't provide immediate rewards but will quietly establish their roots through the colder months and yield a generous summer harvest. Planting them in October gives them the best chance to develop before the ground freezes.

Choosing high-quality seed garlic over store-bought bulbs ensures disease resistance and better results, while onion sets benefit from well-drained, consistently moist soil.

In addition to food crops, fall is the best time to sow cover crops—also known as green manure. These are not grown for harvest but for the many benefits they bring to your soil.

Crimson clover, hairy vetch, Austrian winter peas, and winter rye all protect your garden beds through winter by reducing erosion, suppressing weeds, and improving soil fertility. As they break down in spring, they return valuable nutrients to the soil, setting the stage for healthier and more productive planting in the months ahead.

By taking advantage of fall's unique conditions, Zone 7a gardeners can not only enjoy a rewarding final harvest but also strengthen their garden ecosystem for the coming year. With a bit of planning, you can keep your garden productive well beyond the summer rush—and start the next season with a head start.



TOP FALL CROPS



SPINACH

- Soil Temp to Germinate: 50–75°F
- Days to Maturity: 35–45
- Cold Tolerance: Very hardy to 20°F
- Tip: Sow every 10 days for continuous harvest
- Variety Pick: 'Bloomsdale Long Standing', 'Tyee'

Spinach is one of the easiest and most rewarding greens to grow in a fall garden. It thrives in cool weather, is quick to mature, and keeps producing when harvested regularly. Packed with iron, calcium, and vitamins A and C, spinach is a nutrient-dense powerhouse—perfect for adding fresh greens to your plate even as temperatures drop.



LETTUCE

- Germinates at 45–70°F
- 40–60 days to maturity
- Hardy to light frost
- Tip: Cover with row cloth in cold snaps for longer harvest
- Variety Pick: 'Black Seeded Simpson', 'Buttercrunch'

Lettuce is a fall garden staple that's both fast-growing and endlessly versatile. With countless varieties to choose from, you can enjoy tender leaf or butterhead lettuces well into the colder months. Rich in hydration and low in calories, lettuce is ideal for autumn salads, sandwich toppers, or as a wrap for heartier fillings.



KALE

- 45–60 days to maturity
- Cold Hardy to 10°F, flavor improves with frost
- Tip: Harvest outer leaves as needed
- Variety Pick: 'Winterbor', 'Red Russian'

Kale not only tolerates the cold—it actually tastes better after a light frost. This hardy green is slow to bolt in fall and delivers a steady harvest of thick, nutrient-rich leaves packed with antioxidants, fibre, and vitamin K. It's ideal for everything from smoothies to sautéed side dishes, and it holds up well in soups and stews.



RADISH

- 🕒 25–35 days to maturity
- ❄️ Tolerates frost
- ★ Tip: Sow every 2–3 weeks for steady supply
- 👨🌾 Variety Pick: 'French Breakfast', 'Cherry Belle'

Radishes are the ultimate fast-food of the fall garden, with some varieties ready in just 25 days. They add a peppery crunch to salads and are surprisingly delicious roasted or pickled. Beyond their flavor, radishes help loosen compacted soil with their fast-growing taproots, making them great companions in mixed plantings.



CARROT

- 🌡️ Best Soil Temp: 60–70°F
- 🕒 60–75 days to maturity
- ❄️ Can be left in soil & mulched for overwinter harvest
- ★ Tip: Thin seedlings early
- 👨🌾 Variety Pick: 'Danvers', 'Little Finger'

Carrots grow sweet and crisp in cool soil, and they only get better as the temperature drops. These root vegetables store well in the ground under mulch, giving you the option to harvest throughout winter. Rich in beta-carotene and fibre, carrots are a satisfying fall crop with long-term rewards for your pantry and your health.



TURNIP

- 🕒 50–60 days to maturity
- ❄️ Frost hardy
- ★ Tip: Eat the greens too!
- 👨🌾 Variety Pick: 'Purple Top White Globe'

Often overlooked, turnips are a fantastic dual-purpose crop—you can harvest both the roots and the nutrient-rich leafy greens. Turnips grow quickly and tolerate cold well, making them reliable in unpredictable fall weather. They're high in vitamin C and fibre, and their mild flavour makes them perfect for roasting, mashing, or adding to soups.



GARLIC

- 🌱 Plant cloves in mid to late October
- ❄️ Overwinters in the ground; harvest in midsummer
- ★ Tip: Use organic seed garlic, not grocery store bulbs
- 👨🌾 Varieties: 'Music', 'Chesnok Red'

Garlic is planted in the fall, rests through winter, and delivers a bold summer harvest—making it one of the most satisfying crops for long-term planning. It's a natural pest deterrent in the garden and a culinary essential in the kitchen. Rich in immune-boosting compounds, garlic adds both flavor and function to your garden year after year.



ONION SETS

- 🌱 Plant in October
- ❄️ Will overwinter and bulb up in spring
- ★ Tip: Keep soil moist but not soggy

Planting onion sets in fall gives them a head start on root growth before winter, allowing them to bulb up beautifully in spring. Onions are a kitchen staple, and growing your own means you'll always have fresh, flavorful alliums on hand. They're also excellent companions for many other crops, helping to deter pests naturally.

COVER CROPS FOR SOIL HEALTH

Plant by early October to establish before frost. These improve soil structure, add nutrients, and protect from erosion.

Winter Rye: Deep roots break up compacted soil

Crimson Clover: Fixes nitrogen and supports pollinators (pictured below)

Hairy Vetch: Great for depleted soils

Austrian Winter Pea: Adds nitrogen and biomass



MONTH-BY-MONTH FALL GARDENING CALENDAR

AUGUST

August is all about garden transition—clearing out spent summer crops, refreshing soil, and getting your cool-season veggies started.

Week-by-Week Tasks

- Week 1-2: Sow spinach, lettuce, kale, and turnips directly outdoors
- Week 2-3: Start carrots and radishes (earlier in the month for root crops)
- Week 3-4: Begin prepping beds with compost and aged manure
- Week 4: Start transplanting early seedlings like brassicas

Soil & System Tip: Test your soil pH now—add lime if it's too acidic for brassicas.

Weather Watch: Hot days can still stress seedlings—use shade cloth or water in the early morning.

Pro Tip: Use a simple mesh row cover to protect young seedlings from flea beetles and cabbage worms.

SEPTEMBER

This is peak planting season for fall veggies in Zone 7a. Soil is warm, daylight is still decent, and your crops can establish before the first frost.

Week-by-Week Tasks

- Week 1: Transplant kale, chard, and broccoli starts
- Week 2: Sow more radishes and spinach for succession
- Week 3: Apply mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds
- Week 4: Start cover crops in unused beds (e.g., rye or clover)

Soil & System Tip: Top-dress with compost or side-dress growing crops with fish emulsion.

Weather Watch: Watch for sudden drops in nighttime temps—keep frost cloth handy.

Pro Tip: Mix leafy greens and root crops in the same bed to maximize space and nutrient use.

OCTOBER

Cooler weather means it's time to plant garlic, onions, and spring bulbs. Cover crops should be in the ground by mid-month to establish before frost.

Week-by-Week Tasks

- Week 1-2: Plant garlic cloves and onion sets
- Week 2-3: Finish sowing cover crops like vetch or Austrian winter peas
- Week 3-4: Plant spring-flowering bulbs (tulips, daffodils)
- All month: Clean up remaining summer plants and mulch beds

Soil & System Tip: Build new beds now to save time in spring. Lay cardboard + compost + mulch for easy sheet mulching.

Weather Watch: First frost may arrive late this month—protect sensitive crops.

Pro Tip: Mulch garlic beds 3-4" deep with straw or shredded leaves to insulate them through winter.

NOVEMBER

Frost has likely arrived, but your garden isn't done yet. Focus on protection, cleanup, and setting up your garden to rest well.

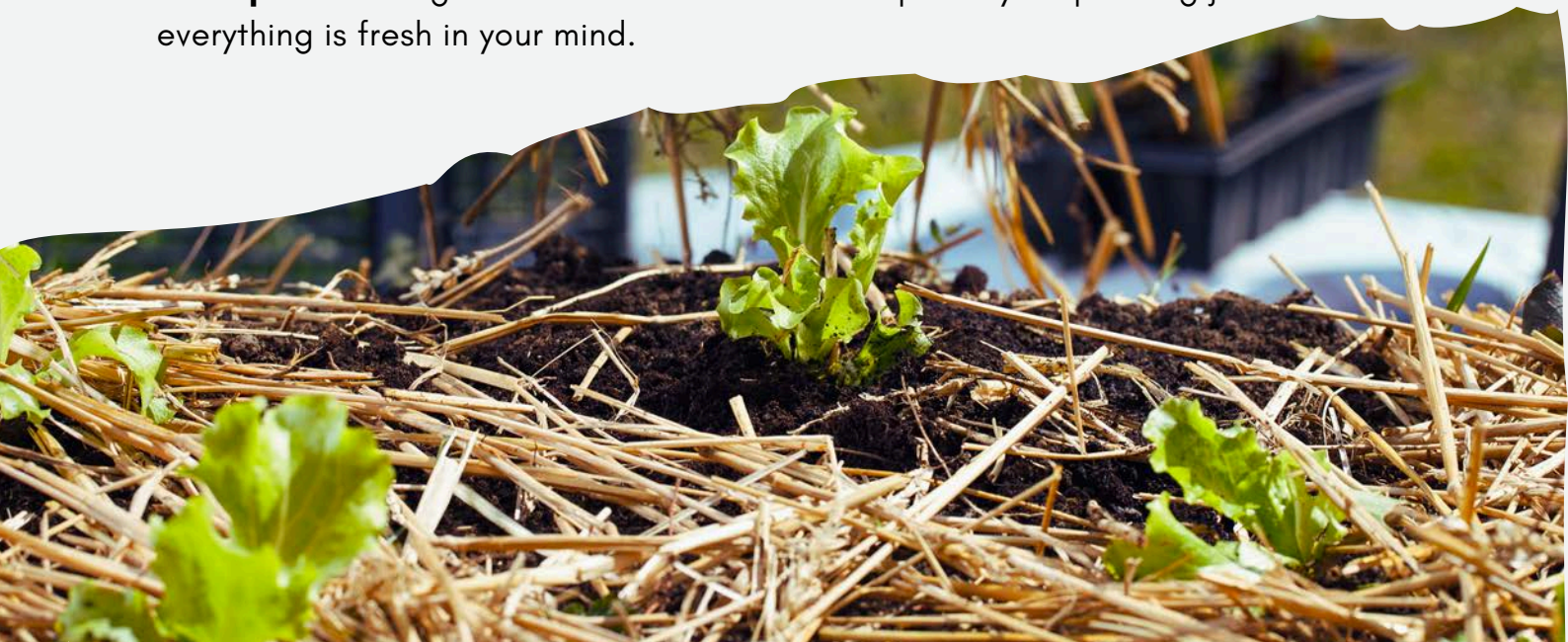
Week-by-Week Tasks

- Week 1: Add winter mulch to all exposed soil
- Week 2: Remove and compost healthy spent crops
- Week 3: Drain and store hoses; clean tools and seed trays
- Week 4: Sow final green manure or mulch thickly if not using cover crops

Soil & System Tip: If your beds are fallow, sow a cover crop or apply compost and mulch to protect the soil.

Weather Watch: Keep an eye out for freezing rain or heavy frosts—cold frames can still protect late greens.

Pro Tip: Now is a great time to take notes and update your planting journal while everything is fresh in your mind.



ZONE 7A FALL GARDENING AT A GLANCE

Month	Week 1	Week 2	Week3	Week 4
August	Start spinach, kale	Sow carrots & turnips	Prep soil & compost	Transplant seedlings
September	Transplant brassicas	Succession sow radish	Mulch active beds	Sow cover crops
October	Plant garlic & onions	Sow last cover crops	Plant spring bulbs	Final cleanup & mulch
November	Winter mulching	Compost old crops	Store tools, drain hoses	Sow green manure or rest beds

**“The garden teaches us patience, reward, and rhythm.
Fall isn’t the end—it’s a quiet invitation to prepare,
reflect, and begin again”**

— From one backyard grower to another



SPRING FLOWER BULBS & PERENNIAL PLANTING

Fall isn't just about veggies—it's also the ideal time to plant spring-flowering bulbs and divide long-standing perennials. These quiet workers spend the winter underground, building root systems that explode into color as soon as temperatures rise.

Spring-Flowering Bulbs to Plant in October–November



Tulips

Plant 6–8 inches deep in well-drained soil. Consider staggered plantings (every 7–10 days) for longer bloom time.



Daffodils

Great for naturalizing—plant in drifts or around trees where they'll return year after year.



Crocus

These early bloomers pop up even through snow. Best planted in clumps near walkways or beds you'll see in late winter.



Alliums

Add a bold sculptural element to borders. Large varieties like Globemaster need extra space.



Hyacinths

Known for their strong fragrance—perfect in containers or near windows where scent can be enjoyed.

Planting tip: *Bulbs should be planted 2–3 times deeper than the bulb is tall. Add bone meal, bulb fertilizer, or compost to the planting hole to give them a head start.*

Design tip: *Group bulbs in odd numbers (3, 5, or 7) for a more natural look.*

Divide & Replant These Perennials in Fall

Perennials that have become crowded or overgrown benefit from being lifted and divided in early fall, while the soil is still warm but the air is cool.

- **Hostas:** Easy to divide; simply slice through the clump with a spade and replant
- **Daylilies:** Divide every 3–5 years for best flowering
- **Bearded Iris:** Remove and discard old central rhizomes; replant young outer fans
- **Peonies:** Can be divided, but may skip blooming for a season—replant shallowly, with eyes just below soil surface

Tip: Water thoroughly after dividing, and apply a light mulch to help roots establish before frost.

Other Bulbs & Perennials to Consider

If space allows, include a few lesser-known fall-planted bulbs to surprise your spring garden:

- **Anemone blanda** – daisy-like flowers, early blooming
- **Fritillaria** – striking, bell-shaped blooms
- **Snowdrops** – among the first flowers to bloom, even before crocus
- **Scilla** (Siberian squill) – hardy and fast spreading
- **Eranthis** (Winter aconite) – golden blooms perfect for woodland areas

Bonus Tips for Success

- Avoid soggy spots—bulbs rot easily in poor drainage
- Use bulb baskets or mesh if critters (like squirrels) are a problem
- Mark your plantings with small tags or garden stones so you don't dig them up in spring
- Mulch lightly over bulb beds to prevent frost heave but avoid compacting the soil



FALL GARDEN MAINTENANCE TASKS

Task	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Why it Matters	Tips for Success
Remove Spent Crops	Y	Y	Y		Prevents pests & diseases from overwintering	Compost healthy plants; trash diseased ones
Add Compost	Y	Y			Replenishes nutrients for next season	Apply 1-2 inches across beds after clearing
Mulch Beds		Y	Y	Y	Insulates soil and prevents erosion	Use straw, shredded leaves, or bark
Plant Cover Crops		Y	Y		Protects soil structure and adds nutrients	Sow before first frost for best growth
Plant Garlic & Onion Sets			Y		Establishes roots before winter dormancy	Mulch heavily after planting
Drain & Store Hoses				Y	Prevents freezing and cracking	Coil hoses loosely and store indoors if possible
Clean & Store Tools				Y	Extends tool life and prevents rust	Clean blades, oil metal parts, & hang up neatly
Protect Late Crops			Y	Y	Extends harvest into winter	Use row covers, cold frames, or frost cloth
Compost Fall Leaves			Y	Y	Creates nutrient-rich material for spring	Chop leaves first for faster composting
Take Garden Notes				Y	Plan improvements for next season	Record successes, failures, & ideas for spring

Bonus Tip:

If you're tight on time, prioritize clearing diseased plants, mulching exposed soil, and draining hoses before heavy frosts arrive. Those three jobs protect your garden and your tools through the harshest months.

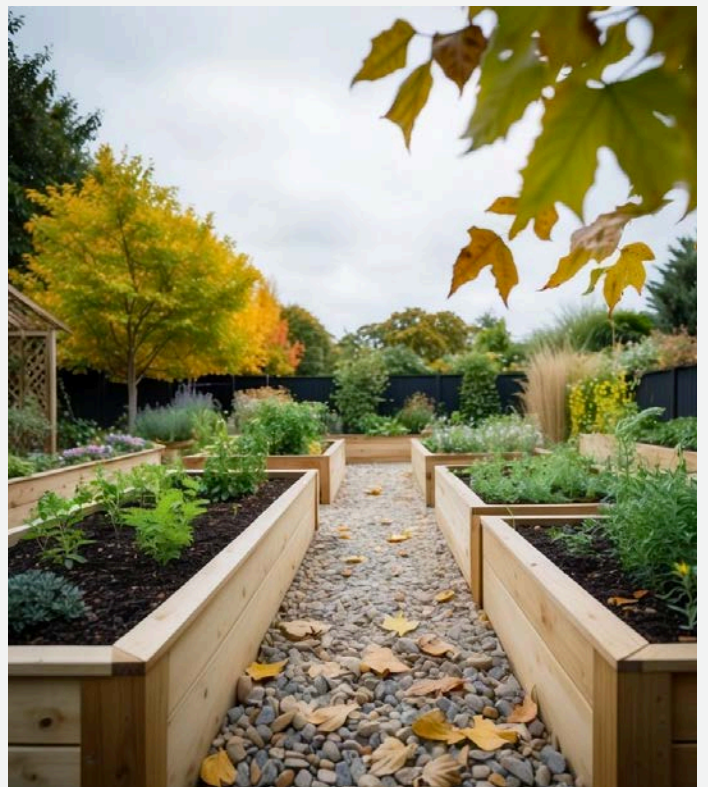
FALL GARDEN DESIGN & LAYOUT TIPS

Fall brings a different rhythm to the garden, and your design and layout choices can make a big difference to your success. Unlike spring and summer, when quick growth and long daylight dominate, fall is about working with cooler temperatures, slower growth rates, and shorter days. Thoughtful fall layouts help maximize your harvest, protect vulnerable plants, and build healthy soil heading into winter.

Here are some key tips for designing a productive and resilient fall garden:

Choose Low Beds or Raised Planters with Good Drainage

- *Fall weather can bring sudden rains and cooler nights that lead to soggy soil. To avoid waterlogged roots and plant diseases, use low beds or raised planters with good drainage.*
- *Raised beds warm up faster during sunny fall days, helping seeds germinate and roots establish.*
- *If you're growing in containers, make sure they have plenty of drainage holes and use a light, well-draining soil mix.*
- *Mulch around plants to protect the soil surface without trapping too much moisture against stems.*



Combine Leafy Greens and Radishes for Staggered Harvests

- *Fall gardens are perfect for succession planting—where faster crops are grown alongside slower ones.*
- *Plant quick-maturing radishes between slower-growing lettuces or spinach.*
- *You'll harvest the radishes first, leaving more space for leafy greens to expand as the season cools.*
- *This approach maximizes your growing space and keeps beds looking full and productive*



Interplant Garlic Along Edges to Repel Pests

- *Garlic isn't just a future harvest—it's a natural pest deterrent too.*
- *Plant garlic cloves along the edges of your beds or between slower-growing crops.*
- *As garlic grows, it releases sulphur compounds into the soil and air, which naturally repel common pests like aphids and spider mites.*
- *Plus, the strong upright habit of garlic doesn't shade out neighboring plants, making it a perfect boundary crop.*

Add Flowers like Calendula and Nasturtium for Color & Pollinators

- *Just because it's fall doesn't mean your garden has to lose its color!*
- *Calendula (pot marigold) is cold-hardy and can bloom well into late autumn in Zone 7a.*
- *Nasturtiums can sprawl beautifully over bed edges and attract late-season pollinators.*
- *Both plants are edible, attract beneficial insects, and help deter pests like aphids and whiteflies.*
- *Adding flowers also helps extend food sources for bees and other pollinators preparing for winter.*



Use Cold Frames or Low Tunnels for Protection

- *If you're designing your fall garden for an extended harvest, consider building a simple cold frame or installing a low tunnel over part of your bed.*
- *These structures protect crops from early frosts, retain soil warmth, and create mini-greenhouse conditions.*
- *Great crops to grow under cover include spinach, lettuce, carrots, and radishes.*
- *Even a few degrees of protection can add 4-6 extra weeks of productive growing time.*



Plan for Easy Access and Maintenance

- *Shorter daylight hours mean you'll likely be gardening in the cooler mornings or early evenings.*
- *Group faster-growing crops (like radishes, spinach) near the front or sides of beds for quick access.*
- *Reserve the back or center of beds for longer-term crops like garlic and overwintering onions.*
- *Keep pathways clear and mulched—fall rains can make access slippery if left bare.*

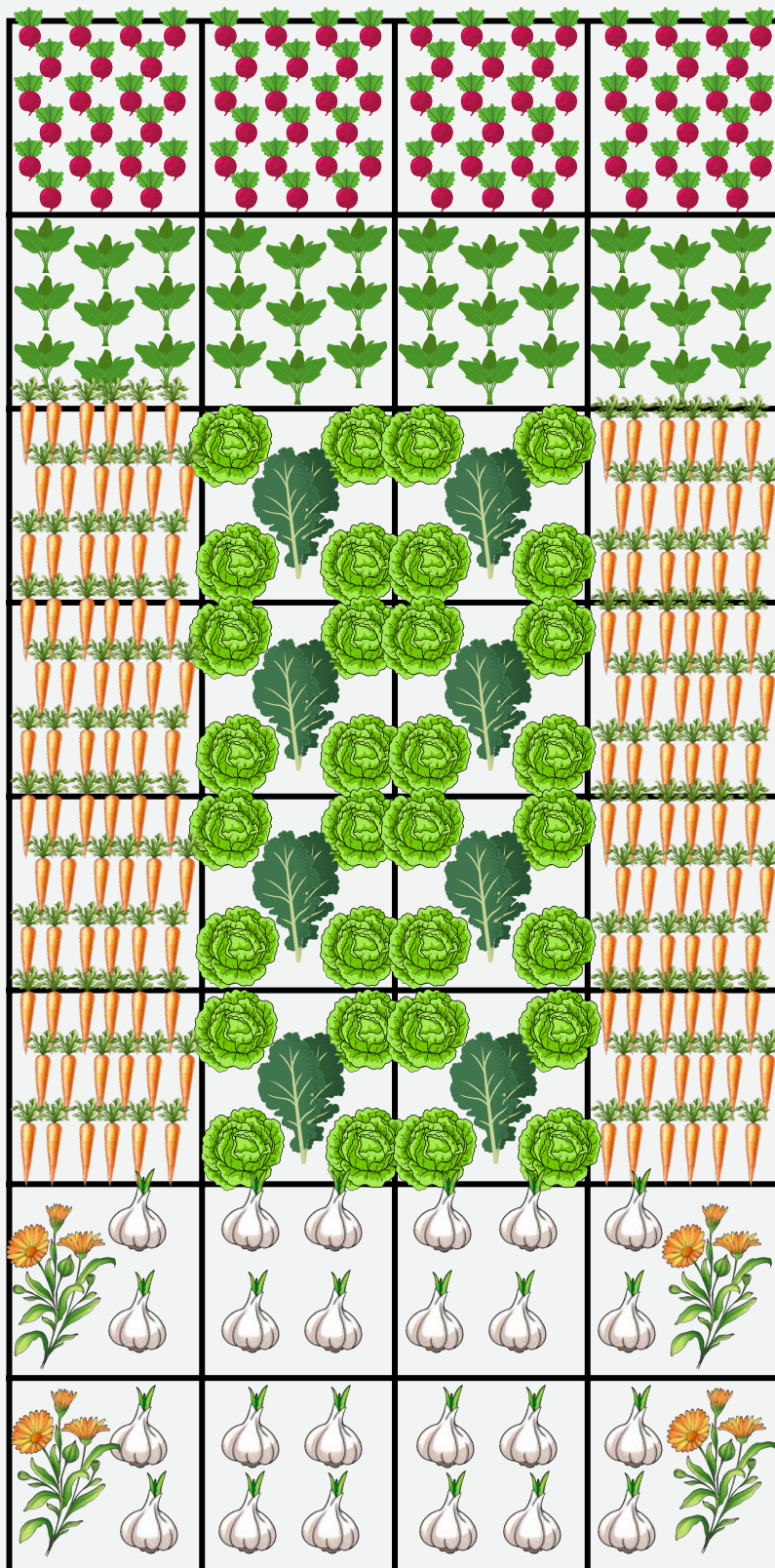


Focus on Soil Building as Part of the Layout

- *Fall is a perfect time to integrate soil improvement into your garden design.*
- *Dedicate some beds to cover crops like clover or rye rather than vegetables.*
- *Mulch heavily around crops you intend to overwinter, enriching the soil naturally through decomposition.*
- *Rotate crops where possible, giving heavy feeders (like leafy greens) a break next season.*

Quick Layout Ideas for a 4x8 Fall Bed

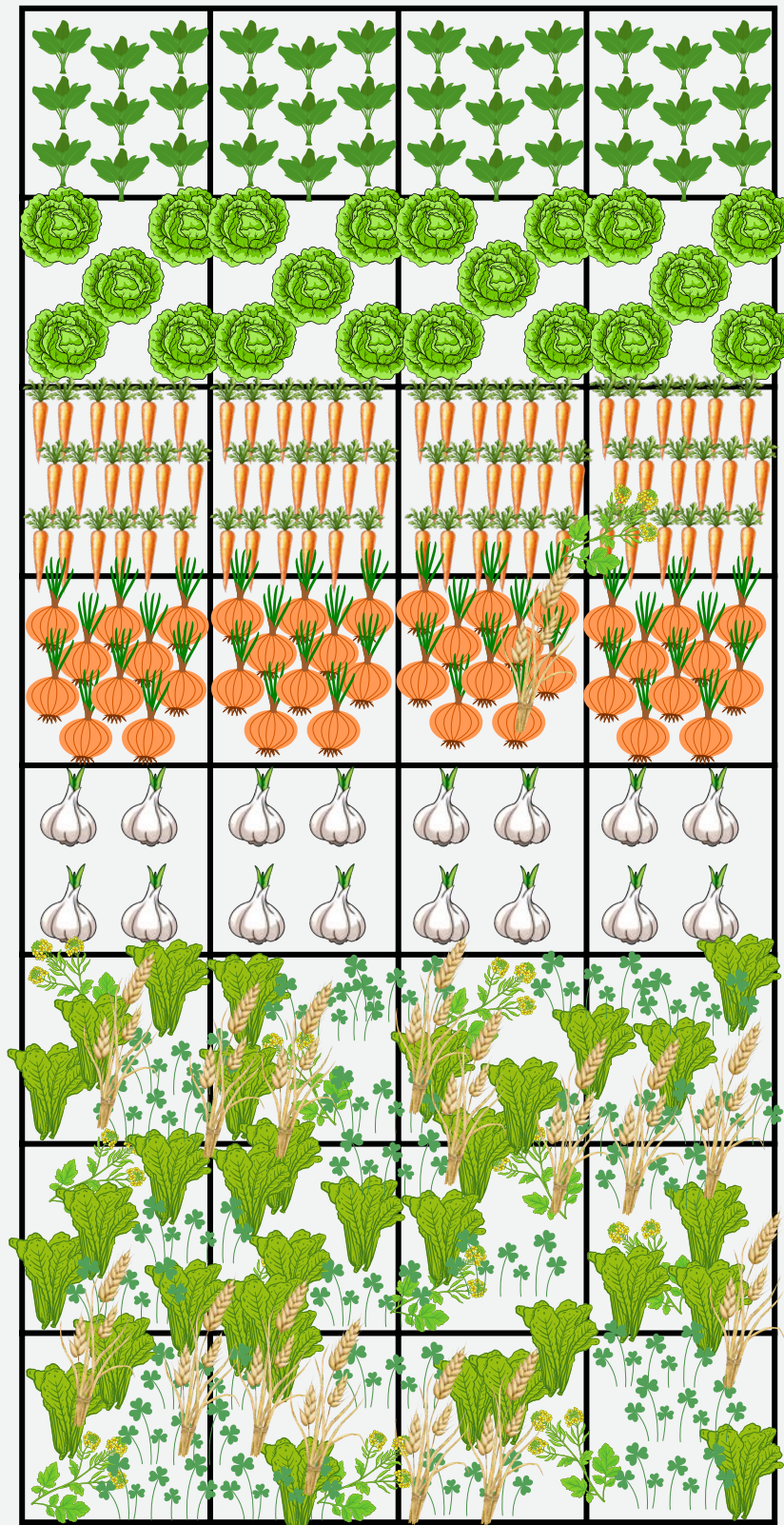
Example A (Succession Focus):



- Front 2 ft: Radishes and spinach (fast-growing)
- Middle 4 ft: Kale, lettuce, carrots
- Back 2 ft: Garlic rows + companion calendula

Quick Layout Ideas for a 4x8 Fall Bed

Example B (Extended Season Focus)



- Front 3 ft: Cold-hardy greens under low tunnel
- Center 2 ft: Onion sets and overwintering garlic
- Back 3 ft: Mulched over cover crop area

Final Tip:

Design your fall garden with the mindset that you're not only harvesting now—you're setting the foundation for a stronger, healthier spring garden.

BEGINNER FAQ

Fall Garden Edition

Q: Is it worth planting in fall?

A: Absolutely! Cool-season crops grow sweeter, and fall prep sets you up for an easier spring.

Q: Do I need to fertilize?

A: Use compost or low-nitrogen organic fertilizer. Avoid overfeeding slow-growing fall crops.

Q: Should I water in fall?

A: Yes! Roots still need water to establish. Water deeply 1-2 times per week.

Q: What if I'm planting late?

A: Stick to fast-growing greens and root crops. Use row covers to extend the season.



SUMMARY

Fall gardening in Zone 7a is a season of opportunity. With the right timing, thoughtful planting, and a little preparation, your garden can continue to produce fresh, nutrient-rich crops long after the summer heat fades. From quick-growing radishes and tender spinach to overwintering garlic and spring bulbs, fall offers a second chance to harvest and a valuable opportunity to build healthier soil for the year ahead.

Whether you are layering fast crops alongside longer growers, protecting beds with cold frames, or sowing cover crops to restore soil health, every action you take now prepares your garden for a strong, vibrant spring. Designing your garden with succession planting, drainage, access, and biodiversity in mind will help you get the most out of every square foot — even as the days shorten and the first frosts arrive.

By working with the natural rhythm of the seasons and focusing on soil health, staggered harvests, and smart protection strategies, you can enjoy a rewarding fall harvest while laying the foundation for future success. Fall is not the end of the growing season; it's the beginning of something new.

Thank you for trusting BecsBackyard to guide you through your fall gardening journey. Wishing you a season full of growth, resilience, and quiet rewards.

