

## **Time to Get Started on Your Fall Garden**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you are like many gardeners, by the time you get to the end of July you are probably hoping that the tomatoes in your garden hang on for a while longer but you don't really care about the rest of it. The summer has been hot, it has been dry at times, and your enthusiasm for working in the garden to provide some of your own vegetables may have left about 3 weeks ago!

Unfortunately, if you pack in the gardening activities right now, you may easily be missing out on the best part of gardening. You see, spring gardening is a reaction to winter. It is a desire to be outside doing something, anything, just to be outside in the spring weather. Gardening is a natural fit for that. But fall gardening is spending a little bit of time out in the heat of mid summer literally sowing the seeds for a great harvest of fresh vegetables in the fall. Spring gardening means you will be out in the heat trying to get crops to harvestable stage before the heat or the bugs get it. Fall gardening gives you the opportunity to enjoy time in the garden with new plants and new harvest as we head into my favorite time of the year!

Obviously the list of garden crops we can plant at this time of year is much shorter than earlier in the year. We need to focus on crops with shorter growing times that are also adapted to conditions that will be cooling off in about a month. The most time sensitive of our fall crops would be potatoes. You can plant these almost anytime during late June or July and we are getting towards the end of the planting season. If you hurry though you can still get these in and at least get some new potatoes or mid-sized potatoes.

Other crops that you may be able to get a crop of, if you hurry in your planting, include cucumbers, snap beans, summer squash and Swiss chard. You'll need to be aggressive in your control of squash bugs though if you try summer squash.

Other crops that you can plant now and on into about the third week of August include: beets, kale, lettuce, carrots and turnips. Later on in August and even into September you can plant leaf lettuce, radish, spinach and more turnips. IF you can find transplants you can plant cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. If you can't find transplants you can try to plant seeds and keep your fingers crossed that we don't have an early frost, but these crops are fairly frost tolerant.

You have to approach a fall garden a little bit differently than a spring garden. Start by tilling up the area you are going to plant. It probably wouldn't hurt to apply some general garden fertilizer, like a 12-12-12 or similar before tilling and then again after tilling. The soil will be warm so water will evaporate quickly but seeds, both crop and weed, will germinate quickly. Water daily, in the absence of rain, to get crops out of the ground quickly. Hoe to control the weeds and once the crops are up and growing, consider using one of the garden weed preventers. Once the crops are out of the ground and getting a root system established you will be able to back off on the irrigation, but don't let the soil get too dried out, which can happen in a hurry in August. Also consider mulching to keep the weeds down and the soil cooler and moister!

As we move further into fall and the risk of frost becomes a possibility, you can extend the season further through the use of floating row covers. But we can discuss that in another six weeks. In the meantime, get rid of part of that garden that you are tired of, get it cleared off and tilled up and get started on Round 2 of the gardening season.