



Canadian Organic Growers

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Canadian Organic Growers Inc is Canada's national membership-based education and networking organization representing farmers, gardeners and consumers in all provinces.

COG Reference Series

#11, Succession Planting

(How to prevent "feast" or "famine" in the garden)

Most of us have longed for a fresh vine-ripened tomato in late June or early July, only to throw up our hands in frustration in August as we are deluged with fruit. Beans are famous for their ability to ripen in one massive wave and corn can so overwhelm us that we never want to see another cob! Lettuce often seems to fill the salad bowl for a few fleeting moments only in late spring before it bolts to seed under a hot summer sun. But the heart - these problems can be overcome. Succession planting can extend the gardening season and reduce that familiar "feast or famine" syndrome. Below are some practical ideas that will help you have a good all-season harvest.

Lettuce

Start by sowing a few seeds of Romaine lettuce in recycled cups in late March.. Valmine is a good choice. Thin to one plant per cup and transplant to a garden cold frame in April. (A cold frame is worth the space it takes).

You should have succulent and tasty heads by the first of June. Romaine lettuce seeded again about the middle of July after the peas are finished will mature in September.

Seed leaf lettuce directly into the garden. Grand Rapids and Ruby Red are delicious and add color contrast to your salad. Oak leaf lettuce is decorative both on your plate and in the garden. Buttercrunch can withstand a little more heat than other varieties.

1st Seeding: This crop can be planted in late April between the pea rows and will be ready for picking in early June.

2nd Seeding: About the 24th of May for late June picking.

3rd Seeding: About the 10th of June for an early July harvest

To conserve space and minimize bolting, especially for the July harvest, plant between the rows of corn in the garden. The lettuce benefits from shade under the corn and is much sweeter and crisper as a result, usually producing through the end of July. Fresh lettuce in August is rare, although your July pickings will usually keep crisp for a week or two in the refrigerator.

4th Seeding: Sown about the middle of July in the space where peas have grown. The plants will mature in early September.

5th Seeding: An early August planting will result in the most enjoyable lettuce, producing into October and sometimes beyond. Remove your earliest corn and use this space for a fall garden.

You can also use your cold frame for later seedlings.

To encourage good lettuce germination in hot weather, keep the seeds in the refrigerator or freezer. Cover with a board to ensure that the soil stays moist until plants are ready to emerge. Lettuce sown in the summer must be watered regularly.

Corn

Choose a very early 55 day variety of corn for your 1st planting.

1st Planting: Sow about May 1st - 3 weeks before the average date of the last frost.

Because the soil is often cold at this date, pregermination is a good idea. The seed should be soaked overnight and kept moist and warm for two or three days before planting outdoors under clear polyethylene tarp. As soon as the corn pushes through the soil, remove the polypropylene tarp to prevent overheating or perforate and raise the tarp a few inches on wire hoops. Floating row covers, such as Reemay, can be used instead of polyethylene tarp. Leave the covers on the corn for the first few weeks. They help to keep the soil and plants warm and protect against those sneaky late frosts. Even in a small garden area it is possible to plant a block of corn-i.e. a square of four rows rather than long single or double rows. This early sweet corn can usually be picked during the latter part of July when most corn is still being imported from more southern climes at exorbitant prices.

2nd Planting: Should be made about the 24th of May, and should include two somewhat later kinds (mature in 65 and 75 days respectively). They will ripen during the first three weeks of August.

3rd Planting: Seed should be sown by the 10th of June and should include two more varieties, maturing in 75 and 85 days respectively. Ripening will take place in late August and September.

This gives almost two months of fresh corn on the cob with plenty left over for freezer. Don't plant the super sweet corn or the sugar enhanced varieties. Plantings on May 1, May 24 and June 10 are usually far enough apart to prevent cross pollination.

Radishes and Green Onions

These can also be sown, along with leaf lettuce, between rows of peas and corn. They make good use of space, extend the season (you can make four small plantings) and are picked long before the corn or peas reach any significant height. They also do well in a "recycled" pea or corn patch because they thrive in the cooler weather of the fall. Furthermore, root maggots are much less of a problem during late summer and autumn. Try a few of the foot long Japanese radishes which do marvelously well as a late-season crop when planted in early August.

Spinach

Plant very early with the peas so that it doesn't bolt to seed from the heat. Plant again in early August for maturity in the cool weather of autumn.

Chinese Cabbage

Direct seed in early June in the "recycled" pea patch. Springtime is a very early variety but Jade Pagoda, which is a little later produces larger crisper head that keep very well. Thin plants to give 2 feet spacing (do not transplant or they could bolt to seed). Your Chinese cabbage will be ready by October and will keep in a cold room or cool garage until Christmas.

Kale

An early July planting will produce greens into November. Kale withstands heavy frost. In fact, it needs frost to bring out its best flavor.

Rutabagas

Rutabagas can be crisp and sweet if allowed to mature in the cool weather of September and October. Do not plant before June 15, or the roots will be hot and hard. The first, and worst, generation of root maggots will be over by this date as well.

Parsnips

Parsnips need 120 days to fully develop. Consequently, plant in early spring for digging in October or November. If you can mulch well to prevent the ground from freezing, you can dig them all winter. In any case, leave some roots in the ground for digging in early spring when the ground thaws. Freezing increases the sweetness of parsnips.

Brassica Family

Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi and brussels sprouts are great season extenders, both in spring and fall, as this family thrives in cool weather.

1st crop: Start a few seeds indoors in late March (except for brussels sprouts). Transplant to a cold frame in the garden during late April. The kohlrabi will be ready by the 1st of June, early varieties of broccoli during the first week of June, early cauliflowers by the middle of July, and early cabbage by the end of June.

2nd Crop: transplant a few more plants of each to the garden around the 20th of May for a second early crop (brussels sprouts will be ready in fall).

3rd Crop: Direct seed broccoli, kohlrabi and early cauliflower between the rows of your June 10th corn planting. Then, transplant to the pea patches in early July. These plants will mature in the cooler weather of September and October to produce your best crop.

Tomatoes

To pick ripe tomatoes from the last week of June through the end of September, a few seeds must be sown indoors by the middle of March. Eventually transplant them to 4 liter containers and provide plenty of light and nutrients. For the early crop, some kind of greenhouse, sunny warm porch or large window is necessary. The plants will be large and will have set fruit by the time they are ready to set out around 15th of May. Protect these plants from the wind and cold (e.g. tomato cages wrapped with clear folio). If given the right conditions, tomatoes should be ripe for picking by the last week of June.

Main crop tomatoes can be grown in 1 liter milk cartons or in flats and transplanted to the garden at five or six weeks of age. These plants will produce ripe fruit from August until frost.

Transplanting from flats slows growth a little.

Peppers and Eggplant

To get early fruits start seed about the third week of March and eventually transplant to liter dairy containers. Grow in a sunny location until transplanting time in late May. Protect from wind and cold temperatures. Peppers will be ready by late June and eggplant sometime in July. They will keep producing right trough October if protected from frost.

Beans

These should be planted in small successive crops starting the last week of May when the

weather is really warm and ending the last week of June. This should give a good harvest of fresh beans all summer long (picking and freezing should never become a chore).

It is sometimes possible to get a later crop, but beans mature slowly in cool weather, are very susceptible to frost and will die at the first touch. If you have a surplus of beans let them dry on the plant or pull the plant and hang them up to dry. When quite dry the beans slip out easily and are an excellent winter source of food. If you have space, you can grow some for this specific purpose.

Cucumbers

To get a few early cucumbers, start a bush variety in March and transplant to a large flower pot. Transplant 3 to 4 week old plants to the garden in late May for your first garden crop. Direct seed in late June again and you will have a long and productive season.

Overwintering Vegetables

A cold room or root cellar extends your season into the fall and winter. Squash, root vegetables (beets, rutabagas, carrots, parsnips), cabbage and potatoes are good keepers.

A freezer also helps to lengthen the season and makes good use for extra quantities during the growing season (corn, peas and beans are the most common candidates for freezing).

Some roots can be left in the soil. Parsnips can be left in the soil without mulching and dug in the spring as soon as the ground has thawed. Winter leeks and carrots, if heavily mulched, can be left in the ground all winter, as well. Perennial plantings of asparagus, Egyptian onions, chives and rhubarb will produce early pickings every spring. Onion and spinach seed, planted in late fall, sometimes produces a very early spring crop.

Summary

If you implement some of the above ideas, you will get more produce, both earlier and later in the season when gardens normally are least productive. Always grow a large variety of vegetables in several small plantings for the best results (diversity helps to minimize the effects of harmful insects as well). Use plenty of compost, rotate your plantings, and you will be well rewarded. For further information about successive planting and organic gardening in general, consult other Cog reference folders.

Sources of Information

Cold Frames and more elaborate and or expensive aids, such as cable warmed beds, solar growing frames, funnels, etc. are explained with diagrams in **High Yield Gardening** by *Majorie B. Hunt and Brenda Bortz* Emaus, PA: Rodale Press 1986 430 pp.

Elliot Coleman New Organic Grower, **A master's Manual for the Home and Market Gardener**, Camden East: Old Bridge press 269 pp.

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