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OUR SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENS BEGIN AROUND THE FIRST OF THE YEAR

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Winter is just beginning for us here on the Gulf Coast, but that doesn't mean we can't continue growing fresh, nutritious vegetables.

Prepare your garden soil by digging in some good quality compost or composted manure after removing your summer crops and any weeds.

Plant seeds now for lettuce, kale, greens (turnip, mustard, collard), spinach, carrots, & beets. Tender seedlings will be sensitive to freezing, but plants with 3 - 4 sets of leaves will be hardy. If frost damage occurs, there is still plenty of time to replant through January. The goal is to harvest a crop before you need the space for the next warm season crop. In January you can still plant broccoli or cauliflower transplants if you have a 3' x 3' space available for each plant.

Late December is a good time to plant onion sets (not seeds) of all sorts, and garlic. Around the first of the year, plant seeds for snow peas or sugar snap peas on a trellis.

It's also time to peruse the seed catalogues to decide on the specific varieties of warm season vegetables you will want to grow. If you need advice on the best varieties to grow in our area, be sure to check out the websites <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu> or <http://urbanharvest.org/vegetables> and follow the links for home vegetable gardening. Order seeds as early as possible to ensure your selection.

The Spring vegetable garden begins around the first of the year. Cost-conscious and variety-conscious gardeners plant the seeds for tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and basil in a warm, protected place during the last week of the year. A pack of seeds costs about the same as one transplant; so if you desire multiple plants

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of a particular variety, it pays to grow your own. Start your seeds in a warm spot in your home or in a greenhouse. Once the seeds sprout, you'll need a strong light directly above them for your seedlings to thrive. Transplants go into the garden around mid-Feb., but need to be protected from late frosts. Use a liquid fertilizer weekly to sustain the seedlings until planting them. Plant more than you plan to use, as a hedge against late frosts, then pass-along those you don't need in March.

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