



Urban Harvest

## Months Ahead can Produce Great Veggies, if Timing is Right

By Bob Randall, Ph.D.

Originally Published in the Houston Chronicle

Temperatures will be hot in the middle of the day for the next eight weeks or so, but after that some of the best vegetable gardening weather of the year will greet us, and the result will be delicious, too. So now is the time to renovate your raised beds and purchase some excellent seeds.

There are two members of the bean family you can try right away. For another week or two, you can still plant one of life's joys -- zipper cream peas. And for the next month, be sure to plant 'Derby' **bush snap beans** (both from [reimerseeds.com](http://reimerseeds.com)). Fifteen feet of either will give you plenty to eat in October and November.

**Carrots**, too, are well worth the effort. Get a large package of fresh seed. In early September, prepare the bed. Water it very deeply. Then broadcast the seed lightly on the surface and pat the seeds in gently. Put some fencing over the bed on pots or other supports about a foot above the soil to keep birds out and then water, water, water until the carrots are several inches high ([veseys.com](http://veseys.com), [burpee.com](http://burpee.com)).

Next up on the list is the cabbage family. There are hundreds of varieties (and species) because the peoples of Asia and Europe have cultivated their own cool season specialties for millennia. All of them will taste better later in the fall, but many of them need to be planted soon to do well. Many good cabbage relatives can be found at [johnnyseeds.com](http://johnnyseeds.com), [territorialseed.com](http://territorialseed.com), [nicholsgardennursery.com](http://nicholsgardennursery.com), and [evergreenseeds.com](http://evergreenseeds.com).

If you want an early salad or some sandwich fixings, you can plant **arugula** now, though it will need to be watered regularly and harvested very young. In September, you can do very well with the mild Japanese salad green mizuna. **Turnips** and **mustards** will also grow well, but flea beetles will probably destroy them if planted this early. So it is better to wait until at least mid-October. The other cabbage relatives -- **broccoli, kale, collards, cauliflower, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, bok choy, rutabagas** and **kohlrabi** -- mainly do best when day temperatures are between 60 and 70 and night temperatures are in the 50s. Temperatures below 40 usually stop them growing for weeks.

Historically, this temperature range happens between the beginning and middle of November depending on whether you are in the colder parts of the area or the

warmer ones. In recent years, day temperatures have averaged a few degrees warmer, so the best planting dates for these crops outdoor is between Nov. 7 and Nov. 21. In the spring, a similar period occurs between March 1 and mid-April.

The problem with these late planting dates is that with the exception of southern inner city Houston and areas within 12 miles of the Gulf, by the middle of December temperatures at night are too cold for good growth. Though the plants don't die, they don't thrive and may not produce until temperatures are right in March.



This snow crown cauliflower needs to be planted from seed indoors in late September and planted outside in early November.

The best way to get around these problems is either to start transplants indoors in air-conditioning 5-6 weeks before the planting date or buy healthy ones at a garden center in November. If you grow transplants, you will need to plant seeds in mid-September if you are in Conroe or Brenham, and about Oct. 1 if you are in areas closer to the Gulf. These plants will need a cool room and fluorescent light 4 inches above the plants 18 hours a day.

Sounds like a lot of work, but in the winter most of the work is in getting it started. There isn't much to do after that, other than water and harvest.

Urban Harvest produces this column. Learn about gardening classes, community and school gardens, farmers' markets, organic landscaping and more at **[urbanharvest.org](http://urbanharvest.org)**.