



Urban Harvest

Summer brings its own bountiful Harvest

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The home-food gardener has been a lot of fun from October to April gardening in our relatively mosquito-free, cool to warm weather. May and June can be hot, humid and buggy, but many of us are so pleased with our spring gardens we hardly notice.

In many food gardens, May and June are the most productive months of the year. But what should one do with July and the months that follow? Is it worth bothering?

I think so. There are dozens of March-to-April planted food crops that harvest in July and beyond, and many more you can plant in any

month this summer. Many are not as famous or as popular as what we harvest in other months, but they are nutritious, tasty, cheap and, being tropical in origin, are easy to grow in our weather.

For starters, consider the spring-planted annuals that harvest in the summer months: pole beans, cucumbers, cantaloupe, watermelon, tropical pumpkin squash, tatume squash, sweet peppers, chilies and sweet corn. You can harvest the summer-ripening fruits: figs, jujubes, pomegranates, pears, bunch grapes, sweet muscadines, persimmons, guavas, calamondins and longans, to name a few. To get any of these this summer however, you need to have planted them months ago.

There are many options for new plantings also. As spring-gardening space clears, you can fill the space with more food. May is a great month for planting basil. We grow a lot of it every year and make pesto for pasta, using organic peanut butter and our just-harvested garlic. Typically, each summer we freeze enough to provide one nutritious pasta meal per week for the entire year. And you can plant your own peanuts now.

Then there's what I think of as the summer stir-fry veggies: eggplant, long beans, chilies, okra and calaloo/leaf amaranth or other greens. Together with our winter-grown onions and garlic, they provide constant and delicious food for the summer and early fall.

Eggplant and chilies need to be planted now from transplants, and chilies would be more productive if planted earlier. Eggplant and long beans (aka asparagus bean) especially are good at www.evergreenseeds.com, and there are many varieties of leaf amaranth at www.rareseeds.com. I grow the local heirloom okra Zeebest (also from rareseeds.com), but any of them will grow here and produce their nutrient-packed abundance. I also like to grow sesame seed and sweet potato spinach.



Then there are what are often called cowpeas in seed catalogs, but are usually called Southern peas or butterpeas by those of us who love them and wouldn't dream of giving them to cows. They are highly nutritious and easy to grow in most soils without trellises or much water. They harvest in two months or less, but need to be shelled and cooked like their cousin, the lima bean. The peas can be dried easily and used in any dried-bean dish, and they are said to be good luck at New Year's.

There are dozens of varieties. The black-eyed pea probably is the most well-known variety, but it's hardly my favorite. I'd probably give that honor to Zipper Cream Peas because the tasty creamy peas are prolific, and their zipper shells are easy to pod. We have had excellent results with Whippoorwills and with Shanty Peas and bad ones with Red Ripper.

There are perhaps 20 more food plants you can plant now, but the ones above are my favorites.

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