



KING HENRY'S WALK  
garden



## PLANTS FOR AUTUMN, WINTER AND SPRING

As you harvest in autumn you will need to make a plan of action for the vacant ground. It is always a good idea to keep the land covered in one way or another to prevent winter rains leaching the nutrients out of the soil and to hold back the weeds. Green manures will give you a break from gardening while nourishing the soil. The alternative is to put in more crops for winter eating and to get ahead next spring.

Seed of winter hardy plants sown in autumn produce sturdy young plants that speed along as soon as we turn the corner to spring. Winter crops take longer than summer ones as they stop and start with the fluctuations in temperature. They tick over gently but, as soon as it drops below 4 – 7°C (40 – 45°F), growth grinds to a halt until the first weak rays of spring sunshine make them race ahead.

Winter is a great time for growing all sorts of greens from unusual salads to turnip tops. It is easy to keep up a supply of salad leaves, spinach, spring cabbage and oriental greens as cut-and-come-again crops grown outside through winter just so long as you give them some protection with crop covers.

**Lettuce** seeds sown this month generally germinate quickly and can be thinned to about 16cm (6ins) apart. Choose hardy varieties like the heirloom 'Winter Density' – a cos type – or one of the winter butterheads. 'Arctic King' was bred purely for winter growing and has exceptional hardiness, as does 'Valdor'. Sown in September, they will be fully grown in January.

Some of the lesser grown salad leaves come into their own in winter when there is not much fresh green about.

**Lamb's lettuce, mâche or corn salad**, which is widely enjoyed in France and Italy, produces masses of fresh green leaves. It dies down in the worst of the winter but springs back to life in spring. Sow a few seeds every two weeks in a sunny spot between now and late autumn. Thin by taking out every other plant until you are left with gaps of about 10cm (4ins), then pick leaves from the outside and let them grow on. 'Cavallo' is a good cultivar.

**American land cress** is a wonder plant that really does deserve to be grown more widely. It looks and tastes much like watercress being glossy green and peppery. Unlike watercress though, it doesn't need special conditions or much care and attention.

**Claytonia**, *Claytonia perfoliata*, otherwise known as winter purslane or miner's lettuce, is a half hardy plant with juicy, succulent leaves and needs a little protection against frost. It is happiest in poor soil and will self-seed.

**Rocket** is great for adding zest and texture to salads and can be grown all year round. 'Rucola Coltivata' is a good cultivar for winter as it is quick growing, robust and punchy.

**Endive**, *Cichorium endivia*, is an attractive large dark green endive with finely cut lacy green outer leaves fading to a white heart.

**Winter spinach**, 'Sigmaleaf', will produce generous pickings of tender young leaves. The tried and tested heritage 'Giant Winter' is a good performer even in the coldest weather. Make several sowings a few weeks apart in September and select the sturdiest.

**Chicory** will add colour to all the other green leaves. The scarlet leafed 'Rossa di Verona' is a good choice for winter.

If you sow **spring cabbage** now in modules you can plant it out in October. Pointed cabbages 'Duncan' and 'Peter' do a double trick. They will give you leafy spring greens all winter through to March and hearted spring cabbages in summer. Any seeds left over can be sown in spring for summer and autumn eating.

**Turnips** sown now are grown for winter greens rather than their roots.

Overwintering **onions** produce the biggest and best bulbs. Fertilize the ground well and plant onion sets early in September. 'Swift' is a popular variety that produces in May, six weeks before the spring sown ones. The original Japanese overwintering onion 'Senshyu' is another good bet. Onions obligingly grow to the size allotted to them, within reason. For full sized ones plant them about 7.5cm (3ins) apart with the growing tip just below the surface.

**Spring onions** 'White Lisbon Winter' or 'Winter White Bunching' can be sown in autumn for the following May. For winter spring onions plant shallot sets and use the tops as a substitute.

Wait until October to sow **broad beans**. Autumn-sown broad beans usually produce bigger and better crops than spring sown ones and neatly duck the blackfly season. Reliable old cultivars include 'Aquadulce Claudia' or 'Super Aquadulce'. Choose ground that has been manured for the previous crop.

You can sow 'forcing' **carrots** in September but they will grow twice as fast and catch up if you sow them next March. A good choice is 'Amsterdam Forcing', an old variety still said to be the first carrot of the year. 'Early Nantes' is ever popular.

Plant **garlic** in November as it needs a period of cold.

Plant new **strawberries** or pin down the runners in September. Remember to start on fresh ground every three years either all at once or in stages. Keep young strawberries well watered for good fruit the following year.

**Summer cauliflowers** can go in either early in October or in early February. A dependable variety is 'All the Year Round'.

**Peas** don't do well in cold wet soil and generally it is safer to sow them in spring. However, in the London microclimate, you could try the hardy 'round seeded' varieties in November for a May crop. 'Feltham First' and 'Meteor' are good choices. 'Pilot', developed in 1904, is said to be the hardiest of the lot.

## Herbs

Sow **lovage** in good soil in sun. Plant a piece of **fennel** root (or sow seed). Protect **parsley** and **chervil** with cloches to carry on through autumn. Split **chives**, pot them up and grow them on on the kitchen window sill. Dig up **mint** plants and bring them in. Pot up **basil** and bring it in.

## Flowers

Some hardy annuals can also be sown out now for next year. **Marigold**, *Calendula*, **poached egg plant**, *Limnanthes*, **California poppies**, *Eschscholzia*, and **poppies**, *Papaver somniferum* attract friendly predators and can be sown in September. Plant bulbs for spring colour.

Autumn sown **sweet peas** make better plants than spring sown ones. Nick the seeds with a sharp knife and germinate them at about 15°C (59°F). Once they've emerged, harden them off for the winter ahead

Pot them up when they are about 5cm (2ins) high and keep them in the cold frame or under cloche cover through winter. They can be planted out in mid spring.

**\*\*TIP\*\*** Some of the seed merchants, e.g. Garden Organic, do interesting mixed collections of unusual salad leaves, oriental saladini and vegetables specifically chosen for winter growing.

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