



Garden Tips & Techniques: Succession Planting

In the vegetable and herb garden, some plants live for a very short time. It can feel discouraging if your cilantro or lettuce starts to flower and taste bitter. However, there is a trick we gardeners have up our sleeve, for keeping a full garden (and plate!) throughout the growing season. It's called *succession planting*.

Basically, succession planting means reseeding throughout the season. You can use succession planting as a tool for keeping the same crop growing throughout the season, or for planting one type of crop in the same space another crop occupied earlier.

Same-Crop Succession Planting

This method works best for plants that succumb to the elements, rather than to disease. For instance, both cilantro and lettuce prefer cool weather. So they are stressed in the middle of summer and develop flowers and seeds much faster than in the cooler spring and fall. If you crave cilantro or a salad in the summer months, simply reseed these crops often – every two weeks or so is a good bet. To keep a steady supply, seed only part of your designated area, to allow space for the next planting. When one planting “bolts” – goes to seed – pull it out and put it in the compost.

This method can also work well for root crops like carrots and beets, or for cucumbers, zucchini, and summer squash that die from a squash vine borer.

If your plant dies from disease, it's best not to plant a crop from the same family in that area, as it will likely pick up the disease.

Multi-Crop Succession Planting

This method can help you grow more crops in a small space, as you can change types over the season. It works best by alternating cool- and warm-season crops. For instance, pair a short season, cool-weather-loving crop like spinach or radishes with a warm season crop like beans or cucumbers. When the cool season crop has finished producing, simply seed the warm season crop in its place. Or, in the late spring, put in a crop that can handle warm weather, like carrots. When you've pulled them all, plant baby lettuce, kale, or scallions. The possibilities are endless!

Multi-crop succession planting can make keeping a crop rotation a little confusing, as multiple crop families grow in one space during one season. However, with some planning and record keeping, it's definitely doable.

Tip: Remember that legumes (like peas and beans) feed the soil. They make a great soil-enhancing succession planting crop.

Succession Plantings with Cover Crops

Constant planting over time can deplete the soil of nutrients. Remember to feed the soil well with compost; it's a good idea to add some with each crop you plant. Another way to tend to soil fertility as well as enhance good soil structure is to plant a cover crop. Cover crops are crops grown for the ways they benefit the soil.

They are usually not eaten but turned into the soil or pulled and composted. Our favorite cover crop for succession planting is **buckwheat**.

Buckwheat is a short-season crop. It is ready to turn in or remove about a month after seeding! This makes it a great candidate for seeding in between other crops. We like to plant buckwheat after a spring crop and before a fall one. An example would be planting buckwheat after a pea crop is done in early July, then turning it into the earth in August. We could wait a month for the plant material to break down, and then seed spinach for the fall and early winter. Buckwheat produces flowers that draw beneficial insects too, so it is a great plant for supporting the health of the garden.

We hope you'll consider succession planting as a tool for getting more from your garden space. Remember to keep the ground fairly moist when you plant new seeds, so they don't have any problem germinating. And enjoy your full and productive garden!

Resources:

Johnny's Selected Seeds has some [great charts and other information](#) about succession planting. Check them out!