



Garden Tips & Techniques: Crops that Reseed

This time of year, perusing the garden can lead to interesting discoveries. Some plants will have survived the winter while others have succumbed. And some little seedlings are starting to germinate and grow. Many of these little plants will be weeds, but others come from last year's crops!

If a plant was left to develop flowers and then seeds, chances are good that some of those seeds will germinate the next year. We see this often with a couple of types of herbs like dill, chives, and cilantro. If the plants were allowed to go to seed last year, leafy vegetables like lettuce, mustard, and arugula will also germinate the following year. Cooking greens, like kale and collards, will form flowers and seeds in the second year, if they overwinter and are left in the garden.

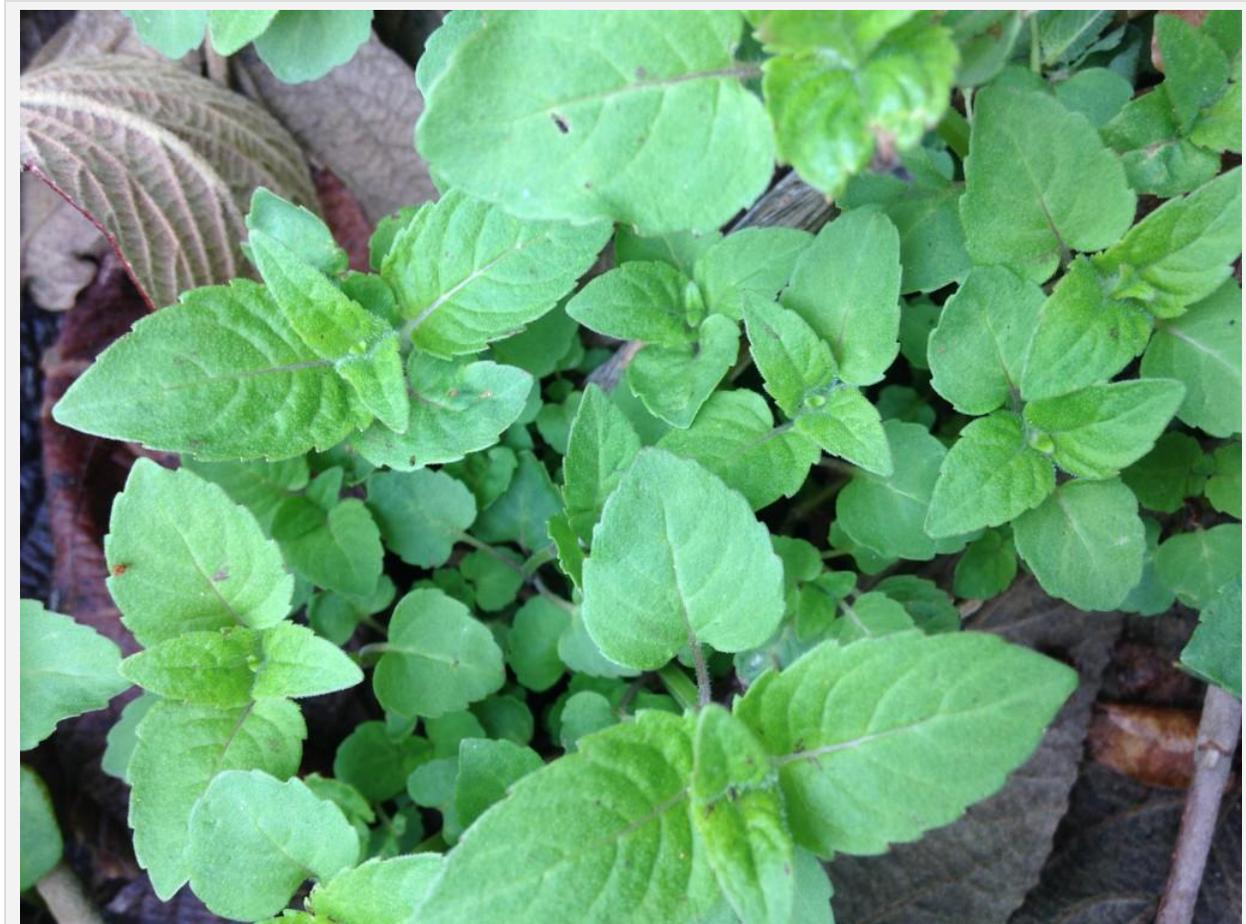


This cilantro seedling came up from a seed dropped by last year's plants. The seed overwintered in the soil and sprouted early this spring.

Fruiting crops like tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers may also spring up, if fruits fell to the ground and were left to rot. Even though the plant growth tends to be vigorous with these “volunteer” crops, the results can be disappointing. Many fruiting crop varieties have been hybridized (a cross between two varieties), which means that the resulting crop will

favor one of the “parent” plants of the hybrid. So the fruits may look and taste completely different from last year’s crop.

If a variety was not a hybrid type, the plant may have cross-pollinated with other crops in the same family. This cross-pollination, similar to the reversion of hybrid crops, tends to lead to odd-looking and sometimes inedible crops. Cucumbers, melons, and squash seeds often overwinter in the compost pile and sprout into lush, hardy plants that produce bizarre-looking, bland, stringy crops. For this reason, unless you have plenty of extra space in your garden plot for experimentation, we recommend removing volunteer fruiting crops from prime garden space.



Many flowers reseed readily. This Monarda, or bee balm, is a good example.

Allowing herbs and leafy crops to reseed can create a low-maintenance succession plan for areas of the garden. Remember to add compost to these areas to keep the fertility sufficient. If pests or disease were a problem with last year’s crop, remove the plants in the reseeded area, and seed the same crop in a different area of the garden. Many pests and diseases can overwinter and cause problems for this year’s crop, if it’s planted in the same spot as last year’s affected crop.

Reseeded crops can save time and energy, and they’re encouraging to find in the garden! Keep the herbs and leafy greens that make sense within your garden plan, and give the rest to friends. And compost the fruiting plants, unless you’ve got space (and unbridled curiosity) to spare!

