



Garden Tips & Techniques: Overwintering Crops

There's no denying the shift toward colder seasons. With the days growing shorter and the nights getting cooler, we're well on our way toward winter. While the garden is a much sleepier place in the winter months, there's no reason it needs to be completely dormant. Here are some suggestions for prepping the garden in order to enjoy some fresh-picked foods throughout the winter.



This carrot bed at the Frick Art & Historical Center Kitchen Garden, will be ready to harvest in mid-fall through winter.

Protect Established Crops

Root crops and some leafy greens can be harvested long into the winter if they are protected well. When heavy frosts become commonplace, try the tips listed below.

- Cover greens with [row cover](#) to extend their life. Cooking greens and some salad greens (like spinach and arugula) can potentially overwinter, depending on the weather conditions in the winter months. A thick layer of leaf or straw mulch under the plants helps to regulate soil temperature.
- Hill soil over root crops to protect them, then add a deep layer of mulch before the ground freezes. A foot of mulch will protect the crops, and keep the ground from freezing over the winter. Dig out the crops throughout the winter to harvest. Check out [this handy article](#) with more details.
- Add a thick layer of mulch to perennial herbs, like sage, thyme, and oregano. You can harvest from these tough plants sparingly during the winter months.



These scallions are hardy and can continue to be harvested as long as the ground doesn't freeze.

Sow Crops to Overwinter

- There's still a little time to seed some quick-growing crops for the winter. Spinach and mache are good candidates. Also try arugula, cilantro, and scallions. Allow the crops to grow as much as possible before mulching and covering with row cover (see instructions above).
- Look for crop varieties that have been bred for cold weather, like Bloomsburg Longstanding Spinach and Evergreen Hardy White Scallions.

Expect Slow Growth

- When daylight is less than 10 hours per day, plants go into a dormant state, which is similar to hibernation in animals. In the Pittsburgh area, this means that there won't be a lot of new growth from mid Nov. through late Jan.
- Harvest greens and herbs lightly during the low-light time frame, as they will be slow to replace leaves that are removed.



These carrots were planted in mid-summer and will be ready for a fall or winter harvest.

Winter harvests are smaller than those in other seasons but the opportunity to step into the garden and the fresh produce can be a welcome change of pace during this cold and dark time of year. With a little planning and care, you can make it happen. Happy winter gardening!