



How-To: **OVERWINTERING CROPS**

While the garden is a much slower-growing place in the coldest 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, into early spring.



FABRIC ROW COVER INSULATES WINTER CROPS AT THE FRICK KITCHEN GARDEN



MÂCHE GROWS THROUGH THE SNOW AT BRADDOCK FARMS

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 tough salad greens (like spinach and beet greens) 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.
- Add a thick layer of mulch to hearty perennial herbs, like sage, thyme, and oregano. You can harvest from these tough plants sparingly during the winter months.

SOW CROPS TO OVERWINTER

In late August to early September, seed some quick-growing crops for the winter. Spinach and mâche 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.