

WINTER FARMING

Learning Objectives

The learner will:

- Identify opportunities for winter farming and season extension.
- Receive an introduction to production aids relative to winter farming.

Climate

Crop possibilities vary widely with climate, but generally there are crops that are well suited to winter production in most cold climates (ie. cabbage family, roots, and greens.)

- Maritime Pacific Northwest climate
 - good for winter crops, ground generally does not freeze
 - cool and moist means no irrigation required, but promotes rot and disease
- Colder climates
 - winter harvest possible with production aids. (see “Production Aids” section of this chapter.)

Winter harvest means summer planting

- The key to fall/winter harvest is to seed crop in June, July, and August to achieve adequate growth by the end of October.
- Decreasing levels of light in fall will slow plant growth to near dormancy. Growth resumes in late winter when the light levels increase.
- Due to the seasonal lack of light and growth, vegetables harvested from November through March must be mature by the end of October. (The exception is over-wintered crops – see “Over-wintered crops” section of this chapter.)
- Lots of space required. No succession planting is possible after this harvest because the soil is too wet, (or even frozen in northern interior climate zones.)

Crops for fall and winter

- Sown in summer
- Harvested October through May
- Must be mature or nearly mature at the end of October in order to survive the cold
- Growth resumes in late winter when most plants will start to flower. If greens become bitter or roots become woody, crops are past their harvest window.
- See Appendix 1 for crop list and planting dates

Over-wintered crops

- Planted in late summer for a spring harvest. (An exception to this would be garlic that should be planted in the fall for a summer harvest.)
- Successfully over-wintered crops achieve enough growth by the end of October to survive the cold, possible snow, and lots of rain.
- Growth resumes in late winter and crop reaches maturity in spring.



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Production Aids

- Season extension
 - *later into fall*
 - *earlier in spring*
 - *December and January still too dark for growth*
 - *Oct, Nov, Feb, March – enough light for some growth but soil temperature must be high enough and the plants will benefit from a protected environment. Production aids will do this, ie. “extend the season.”*

- Warm and sheltered spot
 - south facing slope
 - windbreak

- Mulches
 - straw moderates soil temperature
 - plastic raises soil temperature

- Low covers
 - Row or plastic over wire hoops to create a tunnel over a row crop

- Cold frames
 - Low wood frame with glass or plastic over top

- Walk-in tunnels
 - Plastic over hoops, tall enough to work in

- Greenhouses
 - Permanent, framed skeleton with glass or plastic for roof

Reference: Four Season Harvest by Elliot Coleman



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Assessment/Review

- Can you differentiate between the planting and growth schedules of Fall/Winter harvest crops and over-wintered crops?
- Name several ways of extending the season by using production aids.
- What crops are generally well suited to winter production in most climates?

