



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

And suddenly it's fall.

We just witnessed the most rapid declination in temperatures for this time of year that I've ever seen. The daily average temperature dropped 20 degrees in three weeks!

Tinges of fall leaf color are already showing up.

One and a half to two inches of rainfall were recorded around the area last week, providing our full average for the month. Great start to the rainfall season.

It's a very active time in the garden.

What vegetables to plant now?

Right now in the vegetable garden we plant:

- Brassicas: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kohlrabi, mustard greens, pak choi.
- Legumes: peas, including snow peas and snap peas, and fava beans.
- Leafy greens: corn salad, endive, kale, lettuce, radicchio, spinach, and Swiss chard.
- Root vegetables: carrots, radishes, turnips. Sorry, too late for rutabagas. We plant those in July.
- Garlic and leeks are planted now. In early November we'll be planting onions.
- And for those of you who like it, this is a great time to plant cilantro.

Some frequently asked questions about fall-planted vegetables.

They aren't harmed by freezing weather?

Nope. We get a number of light frosts each winter, but rarely get below 28 – 29 degrees F. Even when nights dip down into the mid-20s briefly, as happened in January 2025, they'll be fine.

Light frosts improve the flavor of many winter vegetables. The starches in the roots and leaves turn to sugar and they become sweeter.

Do they need special soil or fertilizer?

Nothing special required. Add some compost on the surface around the plants, preferably with an organic source of nitrogen. Fish emulsion or any soluble plant food can help young seedlings grow faster.

How often do you water the new plants?

That depends on the weather. New seedlings may need water each day for the first week.

Check daily, water as needed, especially if we have a dry north wind. Plants in raised beds or containers should be checked if we go more than a week without rain.

Any special pests to watch out for?

Aphids and caterpillars are common on brassicas.

Aphids can be blasted off with water, and the caterpillars can be hand-picked or sprayed with organic BT sprays. Activity and damage from both pests will diminish as the nights get colder.

White-crowned sparrows can be our worst pests in the winter garden! These cute little



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migratory birds arrive in October, and they can wreak havoc on young seedlings. Consider putting row cover over the young plants for the first couple of weeks. Avoid bird netting, as the birds can get tangled in it.

How late can you plant?

You can plant leafy greens and sprouting broccoli right through the winter. Peas can be planted by seed through October. As the nights get colder, you can still plant them – just pre-germinate them indoors, or transplant seedlings from nursery packs.

Many cool-season vegetables can be planted again in February for late winter and early spring harvest.

When and how do we plant onions?

From bareroot plants in November. I don't recommend the little onion bulbs, as they are likelier to flower in spring. Loose soil with some nitrogen added at planting is best.

Open areas can be planted with cover crops.

Cover crops are grown to suppress weeds, add organic matter to the soil, fix nitrogen from the atmosphere into the root zone, and provide overwintering habitat for beneficial insects. Fava beans, annual ryegrass and oats, field peas, and clover are planted from seed now.

These all germinate even with temperatures in the 30s, grow quickly in winter, and can be cut or mowed in spring and allowed to decompose on site.

Smaller seeds can be scattered before a rainstorm. Rake lightly to cover with soil. Water daily if it doesn't rain.

Larger seeds such as fava beans can be pushed an inch or so into the ground. Water at the time of planting. For a more consistent stand, germinate them in small pots, and then transplant them about 12 - 18 inches apart.

Flowers for the cool season

There are easy annual flowers that grow and bloom in winter and spring that we can plant now. Some are familiar, such as pansies and violas, snapdragons, stock, and cyclamen. Nursery transplants will bloom right away and keep flowering all through the winter and spring. Sweet peas are worth growing for their special fragrance. Now is the best time to plant them and they're easiest from seed. Give them a short trellis or section of fence to climb on. They make lightweight vines that begin blooming in February and continue until May.

Plant poppies now!

California poppies are best directly seeded where they are going to grow, and it's important not to cover the seeds as they need light to germinate. In fact, the easiest way to grow California poppies is to scatter the seed on bare soil areas just before a rainstorm.

Other flowers to plant from seed.



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There are some very easy garden flowers that you can seed right now for bloom next year and into the future.

Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella*), larkspur (*Delphinium*), sweet alyssum (*Lobularia*), borage (*Borago*), four-o'clocks (*Mirabilis*), foxglove (*Digitalis*), and even nasturtiums can all be planted from seed now.

All of these are likely to reseed and naturalize readily in your garden. Scatter the seeds on bare soil, rake or cover lightly with soil or compost, and water as needed.

Building your soil

Leave the leaves that fall from your trees!

It's great to see this trend taking hold. There's no need to send that valuable source of soil organic matter to the landfill. There's nothing wrong with a tidy garden, but decaying leaves enrich the soil and provide important habitat for beneficial insects such as leatherwing beetles. You can rake leaves into neat piles to let them decompose over the winter, then spread out the compost. Or you can just let them break down where they fall on garden beds or mow them into your lawn. The worms and other soil organisms will thank you.

Leaves, compost, mulch, and cover crops are all things we use to "build soil." This is a term for practices that enhance the soil texture, improve water retention, and increase the soil's ability to hold nutrients for plants to use later.

Fava beans, for example, pull nitrogen from the air via symbiotic bacterial rhizobia that live in nodules on their roots. When the plant dies, the roots decay and release the nitrogen into the root zone where other plants benefit from it.

The greatest amount of this natural form of fertilizer is provided if you cut the fava bean plants down as they are beginning to set the beans. If you wait longer, the nitrogen is used in the amino acids that are in the beans themselves. That's good for you, if you eat fava beans (great, I'm told, with olive oil and garlic), but of less benefit to your garden soil. Cut, don't pull, and let the roots decompose *in situ* for the greatest soil benefit.

Folks with raised garden beds often struggle with watering and nutrient management in their summer gardens because the soil drains so quickly. Cover crops and mulch in winter can really make a difference for the success of next summer's garden by providing some nutrients directly and increasing water retention by the decomposing organic material.

Weeds galore! Act now!

An inch of rain germinates more than just flower seeds. This is an active management period for annual weeds.

Most weeds are easy to control in the 2 to 6 leaf stage. Winter annual weeds that sprout with winter rains include annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*), foxtails, oats, mustard, and bedstraw (aka Velcro plant). By the time this column publishes, seedlings of all of these are likely to be emerging due to that early-season rainstorm. Those foxtails everyone was complaining about last summer? This is when they sprout.



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Whether you mulch, mechanically remove them, smother them with arborist wood chips, cover them with leaves, or spray them, taking action in late October and early November can save you from a lot of work next spring.

Restoring your lawn

If you want to rejuvenate your lawn, this is a great time to rake out the dead patches and overseed. If there's a lot of dead grass, you may need to dethatch first.

As with wildflowers, broadcasting turfgrass seed just before a rainstorm is especially effective. Repeat the reseeding every 2 to 3 weeks as needed, sometimes two or three times, until you achieve good density.

Repetitive overseeding is a strategy used by professional turf managers, especially for high-traffic lawns. You simply continue to spread grass seed during optimal weather conditions, adjusting the irrigation for new seedlings and the current weather conditions. In our area, optimal weather is fall, and again in late winter.

I have had good results overseeding lawns all the way into December. Fescue grasses are our best turf choices in this area as they have better drought recovery and are more disease resistant than other grass species. Perennial ryegrass sprouts and fills quickly, so it can be blended with fescues for quicker results.

Fertilizing lawns with nitrogen while the grass is establishing helps the seedlings to grow and cover faster. Feeding is done at the time of planting, and again in late winter and spring. Organic or conventional fertilizers are both fine. Follow the label directions.

Calling all tree lovers!

Do you like trees?

Join Tree Davis for a celebration of trees and those who care for them! Emceed by yours truly, we'll be honoring a great group of local volunteers and enjoying the brisk autumn air in a lovely climate-ready landscape.

The Tree Davis 5th Annual Legacy Celebration is 2 to 4 pm, November 2, 2025, at the Tree Davis Memorial Grove at 1549 Shasta Drive.

More information at <https://www.treedavis.org/legacycelebration/>



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An armload of kale harvested in January from October planting. Kale and all of its relatives are planted in fall and late winter.



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California poppy seedlings are tiny and rather fragile. The seed needs to be scattered, uncovered, in a sunny location and kept weed-free while the young seedlings get established.



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Cabbageworms are a common problem on young brassicas (plants in the cabbage family). They can be hand-picked or sprayed with an organic Bt pesticide. But as the nights get colder their metabolism will slow and the damage will diminish.



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Nigella, commonly called love-in-a-mist or Persian jewels, is a very easy annual to grow from seed that we plant in the fall. Seedlings will grow quickly in winter, bloom in late winter and spring, and then reseed freely around your garden.



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Leafy greens are easy to grow in containers. This shallow bowl has been planted with lettuce, beet greens, and Swiss chard. Pick as often as you like, all through the winter.