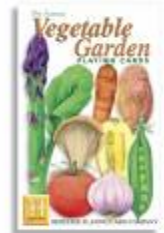


# The Veggie Corner



By Sharyn Iannuccilli, URI Master Gardener

By now, all our vegetable gardens have been put to bed for the winter months. Plants are in the compost pile and veggies are preserved for winter use. It was a reasonably long growing season for the Rhode Island gardener. We were able to harvest tomatoes right through the end of October, and the second planting of lettuce and spinach lasted into the early days of November with the help of row covers. What could be better than that!

Hopefully, you have planted your garlic by now and its green stalks are popping out of the soil. It is time to give the soil a sprinkle of bone meal and cover the growing area with straw to protect the cloves from heaving out of the soil from winter frost. The straw will provide great organic matter to your soil as well.

While the weather brings us indoors, it is a good time to sort through any leftover seeds you may have. Check the seed packets for packaging dates. Onions, corn, parsley, and parsnips have a dependable one year shelf life while peas, beans, carrots, and peppers are good for 2 to 3 years. Beets, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, eggplant, lettuce, pumpkin, spinach, squash, turnip, tomato, and watermelon seeds have good germination for 4 to 5 years out. Discard any seeds that are over that timeframe to avoid wasting valuable seed starting time in the spring. If you really have a problem throwing out your heirloom seeds, remember to scatter seed in the spring rather than individual cell start. That way, you will hopefully get some limited germination, but the quality of the plants from old seed cannot be assured. Remember also, vegetable seeds should be stored in a cool, dry, dark location.

Care of our tools is also a must this time of the year. Remember to give your hand tools a good cleaning before putting them away for the winter. Make sure all the soil is scraped off, edges are sharpened and metal ends are oiled to prevent rusting. Keeping your tools in good working order now will give us years of use.

So, sit back and relax veggie gardener...peruse those catalogs as they come streaming in the mail and dream of next year's garden. Think about growing at least one new veggie next year...we all need the challenge and we know the rewards can be great.

Until next time...