

Fall Planting

Tue, Nov 29, 2022 5:11PM 17:55

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

crops, plant, aaron, garden, frost, planting, season, fall, vegetable garden, temperatures, iowa, horticulture, little bit, grasses, pests, summer, starting, local county extension, winter, pull

SPEAKERS

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C Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

O Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode I visit with Aaron steil consumer horticulture specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Today we are talking about fall planting in home gardens. I'm Olivia Hanlon farm food and enterprise development education extension specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Aaron, welcome. We're glad to have you joining us today.

A Aaron Steil 00:49

Yeah, thank you for the opportunity.

O Olivia Hanlon 00:51

So Aaron, you're fairly new to your role with extension and this is your first time on our podcast. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about you and what your role is here at Iowa State?

A Aaron Steil 01:02

Sure. So I'm a horticulturalist by training. I have spent the last 14 years working at Reiman Gardens, which is a part of Iowa State University. So I'm not new to Iowa State. But this summer I started as the consumer horticulture extension specialist. So my role is to work with

all of the county Extension offices across the state to help address the home gardening questions that come in from all the citizens in the state of Iowa.

O Olivia Hanlon 01:34

Okay, so like I said, today, we're talking fall planting. So let's go ahead and dive into that. To get started, what kinds of things can we plant in our gardens this fall.

A Aaron Steil 01:44

So there are actually quite a few things that are pretty successful planting this time of year in the fall. And it can be anything from some of our vegetables, especially the short crops that like a little bit cooler temperatures. But also, this is the perfect time to start lawns. This is a good time to plant trees and shrubs and a lot of different perennials. And there are even some annual flowering plants that can do well planted later in the season.

O Olivia Hanlon 02:10

Okay, so of all of the things we can plant in the fall, Aaron, what are the best options or what will people be most successful with this fall.

A Aaron Steil 02:19

So when it comes to the vegetable garden, there are several things that you can plant later in the season for harvest, usually kind of October or sometimes as late as Thanksgiving. And they tend to be shorter growing crops. And they tend to be those things that like a little bit cooler temperatures. So things like radish, spinach, lettuce, Swiss chard, beets, sometimes carrots, you can occasionally if you start early enough, kind of late in the summer, you can sometimes even get like a short crop of beans in before frost hits. But many of these plants with the exception of the beans, I suppose but many of the other ones I mentioned, all tolerate a light freeze really well, which make them good candidates for late season planting and can be really nice to have kind of that fresh produce later in the season. And end of August first part of September, we start to see a lot of things in our vegetable garden look kind of tired. So it's a great opportunity if that stuff is done. Or sometimes we have insect or disease issues on our zucchini or on our tomatoes, and they're just kind of done. And so you can pull that stuff out. And you can replace him with some of these crops that do well later in the season.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:41

Okay, so when we're looking at planting those particular crops is there anything we need to do to our garden before we go in and plant those fall crops.

A Aaron Steil 03:50

Typically, you just have to make sure you have a space to do them in many of those things like radishes, spinach, lettuce, they don't take up a lot of space. And sometimes we can even squeeze them in in between rows or some of those kinds of things. But as long as you have a spot to do it to kind of clean up an area in your garden anytime could potentially work.

O Olivia Hanlon 04:10

Okay, So Aaron, if we're wanting to grow on the same area that we grew summer crops, is that possible and does it change any of the preparations that we need to make? Do we need to put anything back into the soil to prepare for the fall?

A Aaron Steil 04:22

Oh, sure. Well, it is possible. Sometimes you kind of have to rotate through crops and occasionally you know, there are some crops like tomatoes and eggplant and peppers where they really are at later in the summer really starting to like go gangbusters and so it can be hard to kind of pull that stuff out and replace it with something new but there are other crops in our gardens that are really done. So things like cabbage, sweet corn, sometimes summer squash depending on how well it fared against some of the common insect and disease issues. Occasionally things like beans where there. They're just kind of finished For the season, those are great candidates to kind of pull out make some room and plant in new crops. If you can add in compost or other organic matter, they always appreciate that. But most of our vegetable gardens don't need an extensive amount of fertilizer. And especially the crops that I had mentioned earlier things like lettuce and radishes, spinach, they do fine in our average soil. And so you don't have to add a lot to the soil necessarily, to do that vegetable gardens, it's really important to do good clean up, but we have a lot of disease and insect pests in the vegetable garden, and making sure that we pull out all that organic matter, so that it doesn't provide a place for those problems to overwinter is really important. So I wouldn't till it in, I wouldn't leave any of that stuff in place that would pull it out, but then you can plant a new crop in its place.

O Olivia Hanlon 05:47

Okay, that is very good to know. Speaking of some of those pests that do get into the summer crops, what kind of pests do we need to be on the lookout for in our fall crops?

A Aaron Steil 05:57

This is one of the nice things about planting later in the season is a lot of the common garden paths, especially in a vegetable garden. But even a lot of weeds aren't as big of an issue later in the season. And even if they are an issue, the crop is so short or the season is so short that they don't become an issue later on. And so we don't have a lot of notable insect pests or disease issues when we plant these short term cool season crops later in the season, which is really nice.



O Olivia Hanlon 06:27

Yeah, that does make it nicer. So you mentioned it a little bit earlier. But our temperatures here in Iowa do vary widely. And we never know when it's gonna get cold. Sometimes it does get pretty cold in the fall, how do we mitigate frost risks for those crops that you mentioned?

A Aaron Steil 06:43

Yeah, so at least in the vegetable garden, many of those crops that we recommend for late season planting tolerate a light frost. So and there are some of them were folks will swear that if they get a light frost, they're even better tasting. So one of the things I haven't talked a lot about are things like broccoli, Brussel, sprouts, cauliflower, these are very good cool season crops, they take a little bit longer. So if you're going to grow them in your garden usually have to start them kind of mid to late summer rather than late summer, early fall. And so at this point in the season, it's a little late to start them. But there are folks that swear that brussel sprouts that have been hit by frost taste better. So they are naturally more adapt to those cool temperatures. But if we have some really cold temperatures, or if we're growing something that we want to or need to provide a little bit of protection for using floating row covers using some frost protection when we see our temperatures at night getting below about 35 is when I really start to kind of pick up and make sure that I'm paying attention so that we don't see damage, most of those crops will take a light freeze. Without problems we get much below say 28-26 degrees Fahrenheit, then we start to see damage even to some of these more cool season crops. And that's where that frost protection can help. But a lot of times we can get this stuff and get a crop out of it. Before we even get to that point. And much of Iowa that first frost is usually sometime in mid October, depending on the year depending on the location earlier in the north and a little bit later in the south of course, but sometimes we very easily can harvest things like lettuce and radishes and some of those other leafy greens before we even have a threat of frost

O Olivia Hanlon 08:31

these are sounding like my kind of crops Aaron short and easy

A Aaron Steil 08:35

they are one of the one of the fastest crops that can be really rewarding. And a gardener is something like a radish. It's usually about three weeks from planting, to harvest, and you can kind of stagger the planting so you don't get them all at the same time. But it's a really wonderful way to get something fresh and easy. relatively quick.

O Olivia Hanlon 08:53

Very cool. So we've kind of covered the garden. Aaron, is there anything else you want to add in when we're talking about fall crops here in the garden?

A Aaron Steil 09:01

A

Aaron Steil 09:01

Yeah, so of course we talked a lot about the vegetable garden but there's a lot of stuff in your yard that are good candidates for fall planting late summer, early fall. So about mid August through September is the best time to establish new turf grass in your lawn. So this would be the time that we would recommend sowing seed and filling in bare spots or establishing new bonds. The seed germinates much more quickly because soil temperatures are very warm, and the turf grasses that we grow really appreciate cooler temperatures Kentucky Bluegrass, perennial rye, the fine fescues tall fescue all of them are cool season grasses and they like the temperatures of fall. And so when you plant in a late summer early fall from seed, they germinate quickly and then they go right into the season that they prefer and you can get a really nice establish a really nice standard of grass planting this time of year. It's also a great time of year to plant trees and shrubs. Sometimes we can see or find good deals this time of year and we get them home I'm wondering what we're going to do with them and you can absolutely put that stuff in the ground this time of year in anytime from kind of the about the end of August through, usually October. One exception to that would be evergreen things like spruces and pines and junipers and those kinds of things really benefit from a little bit earlier in the season because they need to be better established before winter comes. It's also good time to plant a lot of perennials for the same reasons. There are a few perennials that don't do well planted in the fall, things that easily frost heave. So this is the freeze thaw cycle throughout the winter will take shallow rooted or non established plants and work them up out of the soil, and it exposes their crowns and it means they're more likely to succumb to winter injury or death. And so those plants that really easily frosty things like chrysanthemum and coral bells are not good candidates for fall planting, but a lot of our standbys, like day lilies and ornamental grasses. coneflower sedums, those kinds of perennials are good candidates for for fall planting. And so if you find some or if you still have some from the spring still sitting in your driveway that you haven't planted yet, you can absolutely do it this time of year without a lot of problems.

O

Olivia Hanlon 11:20


Okay, that's very interesting about the freezing and thawing and popping out of the ground, I never would have thought of that.

A

Aaron Steil 11:26

And that's one of the big reasons why planting earlier in the fall is better than later in the fall, because it allows more time for those plants to get established. And the more established they are, the less likely that is to happen. And it's a good idea for things that have been recently planted before winter, just after the ground freezes for the first time, you can add an extra layer of mulch, some usually a couple of inches over the plants. And then you'll want to make sure you pull that off as soon as the ground thaws in the spring. And that provides a little bit of extra protection kind of like a little blanket for the winter. For those plants that are relatively new in the ground or may not have had as much time to establish before winter comes. There was one other plant I completely forgot that is perfect for fall planting. And that is all of our spring bulbs. So tulips, daffodils, crocus, and hyacinth from all those minor bulbs like snow drops and winter aconite, Iberian squill. And one notable edible crops, garlic, all of those can be planted the month of October is the ideal time to do that in Iowa. And if you have them, and it's


past October, as long as you can get a shovel on the ground. So as long as the ground isn't frozen, you can absolutely plant bulbs all the way up until that point, just make sure you water them no matter what the temperature is.

 Olivia Hanlon 12:48

Okay, very interesting. So you've given us one or two tips already. But do you have any other tips for those planning grasses, trees and those other couple flowers and things that you mentioned? Any tips to help them be as successful as possible?

 Aaron Steil 13:04


Yeah, well, fall planting in some ways is very similar to spring planting, because temperatures tend to be a bit more mild. But the biggest difference between fall and spring in general, this isn't true every year, but in general is that fall tends to be drier. And so it's very important to keep up with watering on the things that you have planted. And you want to make sure that you check both the surrounding soil and the original root ball of whatever it is that you've planted. And if either of them are dry, make sure that you're watering. And you're going to do that all the way up until the ground freezes. And so that may be if you're planting a tree or shrub, you may still need to water it even after the leaves fall off in October, or November, the ground isn't frozen, you want to make sure that that root ball stays hydrated. And that is really important. And it takes a little bit more effort in the fall because Mother Nature doesn't contribute. In most years. Mother Nature doesn't contribute as much water in the fall as she typically does in the spring. And so the gardener needs to do it instead.

 Olivia Hanlon 14:05

You know, I think some people would argue that she hasn't helped us very much at all this year. Aaron,

 Aaron Steil 14:10

you know, I feel like every year there's some some kind of challenge. That to me is what makes gardening a little bit fun is working through those challenges and figuring out how to deal with those things. But yeah, some years are worse than others. And it's been kind of an up and down year for a lot of gardeners across the state

 Olivia Hanlon 14:28

that it has. So Aaron, if people are wanting more information on anything that we talked about today, or if they have any general questions on their gardens, where should they look or who should they reach out to?

 Aaron Steil 14:41

Aaron Steil 14:41

Yeah, one of the best resources for home gardeners across the state is your local county extension office. So contacting your county extension office, they are often best suited to answer they know what's going on in your area. Because of course things that are happening up in northwestern Iowa often look a little different and on a different timeline than something that might happen in southeastern Iowa and your local county extension office is usually really well prepared for that and knows a lot of that information. So starting with your county extension office is a great place. There are also a lot of really wonderful resources online. One of my favorite is the horticulture and home pest newsletter. It's actually a monthly newsletter that comes out that you can sign up for, but all of the previous issues of the newsletter as well as a lot of other information, including an extensive database of frequently asked questions, what we call the encyclopedia articles, which are information about different gardening topics are all available on a website and it's Hort news.extension.ia state.edu. And it's a great place. If you're looking for online resources. It's a great place to start to find answers to your questions.

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Olivia Hanlon 15:53

Awesome. And in case you did miss that, I'm going to add that in the show notes below so that you guys can find it easier. And Aaron, is there anything we didn't cover today that you'd like to add?

A

Aaron Steil 16:04

I think the only other thing I would say is that fall is also a great time of year to add a little bit of color through cool season annuals. So things like pansies, ornamental cabbage and kale snapdragons, these cool season flowers of like colder temperatures. And often, especially once we get into the after Labor Day, many of our annuals in containers or in flower beds in our yard are starting to get a little overgrown or a little tired looking. So pulling those out and replacing them with these cool season plants means that we can have those wonderful colors in that container or in that garden bed, usually a few weeks past the first light freeze. And so and there are some years where I might have some of these cool season annuals up until Thanksgiving. And so it's a great way to add a little bit of color and have a little bit of fun later in the season. And most good garden centers will start to carry that stuff. They haven't already first part of September, though, you can go out and buy them and spruce up those containers and get a little color for the rest of the grilling season.

O

Olivia Hanlon 17:12

Absolutely. You can't go wrong with adding color somewhere and yeah. All right. Well, thank you very much for joining us today. Aaron. We really appreciated having you on to talk about horticulture or anyone whose ears might have piqued with interest when we talked about grasses Be sure to tune in next week we have Adam Tom's a Turfgrass specialist here at Iowa State on to talk Be sure to come back and thank you again Aaron for coming on with us.

A

Aaron Steil 17:36

You're welcome happy to do it anytime.



Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 17:38

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