

HOME & GARDEN

Late crops have many advantages

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

It has been a difficult year in the garden so far. May was remarkably mild. Even here on my hill I didn't have a frost until after I ripped the April page off the calendar. People who gambled and got a good portion of their gardens in during May are now doing better than those of us who waited until the traditional Memorial Day planting time.

May went out balmy and fine, but June entered and stayed cold and wet. With my new rain gauge I measured 15.3 inches of rain during June. This meant that those crops that really need warm weather and a warm soil did not get off to a good start at all.

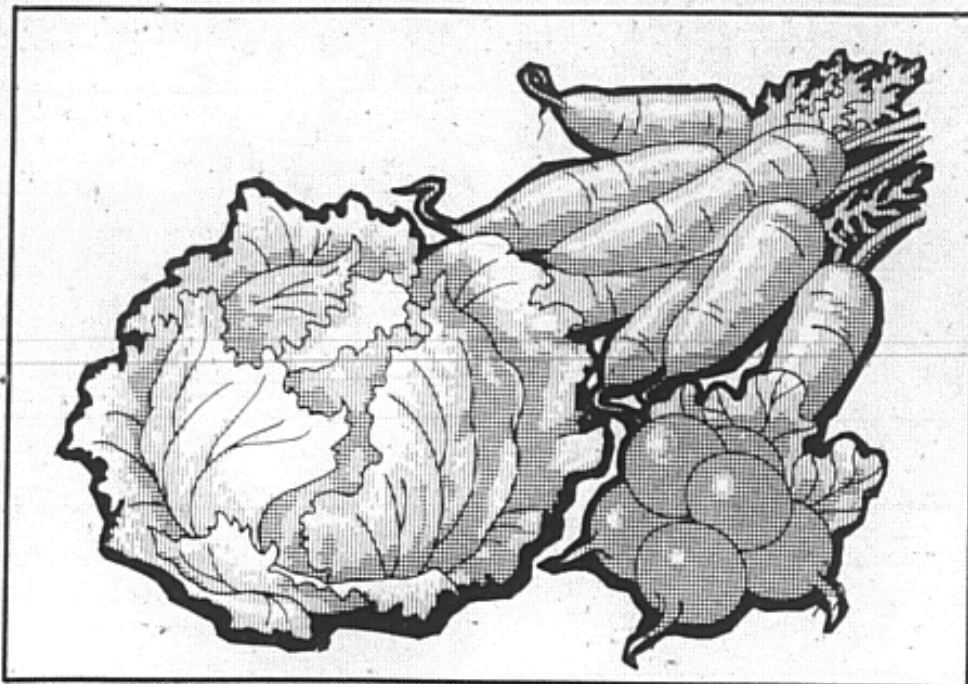
BETWEEN THE ROWS

My first planting of beans rotted, and the second planting is coming along very slowly. Squash are great heat lovers, and I have had to plant my squash three times. It is only now that it looks as though I may have succeeded at last.

Still a gardener need never despair. Even in mid-July there is time to plant and bring in a good harvest. It is just a question of selecting vegetables that either mature in a very short time or crops that don't mind the first light frosts of autumn.

Beans, green or yellow only need between 50 and 60 days to mature, depending on the variety. They do need heat to germinate and grow vigorously. The hope is that by now we will not need to worry about soil temperatures going below 60 degrees.

Beets and carrots are two root crops that will not mind some light frost. The roots are not harmed at all even though the tops look a



little sad. It is only important to get them out of the garden and into the root cellar before the ground freezes solid. Beets and carrots will take two months or just a little more to ripen but the beet greens can be harvested even before the roots are ready for eating.

If you are able to find broccoli and cauliflower seedlings at this time of the year, they will definitely be ready to harvest before the frosts become severe. Perhaps you have even thought ahead to this moment and prepared your own seedlings for a midsummer planting and a late second harvest. Plants in the cole (cabbage) family will tolerate a fair amount of frost. Last year I was still harvesting broccoli side shoots in mid-November.

Chinese cabbage can be ready for harvest in as little as 45 days, so there is even time to make some succession plantings. Not only does it mature quickly, it too will tolerate some frost.

Lettuce can be planted for a fall harvest, but you might want to concentrate on varieties like Royal Oak Leaf, Salad Bowl and Red Salad Bowl that have proved resistant to heat and are slow to bolt. They will be ready for harvesting in 50 days, and there are always a few tender thinnings to sample before then.

While you are planting lettuce, you might want to think about what other greens can go into a quick salad. Cress — dark green, curly and pungent — can be added to a salad or

mixed with cream cheese or mayonnaise to use on sandwiches. It matures in only 10 days. Rocquette, another green with a peppery flavor, is ready in only 35 days and it can be used in salads or cooked as you would spinach.

Other greens to consider are mustard greens, which grow quickly, maturing in 35 to 40 days, and are delicious in stir-fried vegetable and rice dishes. They are also extremely nutritious.

Kale is a heavy, crinkle-leaved green that welcomes frost. It really should not be harvested until it has gone through a couple of frosts. People have been known to pick kale through the snow if it is so hardy. Kale soup, made with potatoes, beans and sausages is a delightful meal to come home to on a cold autumn or winter night.

But before that winter sets in there is still time to think of summer squash, whether you like the yellow variety or zucchini. They are ready for picking in as little as 50 days, and people who routinely plan on succession planting find they can put in summer squash early in August and still reap a fine harvest.

There are some advantages to planting late. You may not have to contend with so many insect pests. If their target crop is not around at the appropriate time in their life cycle, they will not be around to bother a later planting. Also, there are not so many weed seeds flying about, so if you cultivate your bed well to start with, you will find the weeds a little less insistent in their attack.

Finally, remember that with all this rain, some nutrients may have leached away without ever having nourished the garden crops. If you do plant again, do not neglect fertilizing and preparing the soil well, just as you would if this were the first planting of the season.