August in Alabama

During the hot and humid days of August, one of the last things a home vegetable gardener wants to think about is planting more crops. I always try to keep in mind that a fall garden offers a prolonged harvest of vegetables for the year, savings in food costs, and makes full use of my gardening space and growing season. I truly look forward to a new planting season towards the end of summer. Broccoli, beets, cilantro, and radishes are just a few favorites that can be planted this month. They are quick to germinate and mature in far fewer days than, say, corn or tomatoes. Plus, these veggies are not fussy about cool weather!

Continue planting snap beans, turnips, and winter squash this month. It's also the time of year we plant all our leafy greens! Lettuce is an easy cool-season vegetable to grow; however, it can be damaged in freezing temperatures. Lettuce can be planted on the shady side of taller crops to extend the season. Collard greens can be directly sown from seed now through mid-September, as can brussels sprouts and cabbage. Harvested cabbage can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 months! If you need extra space for your fall crops, it may be time to clear out some of those early season crops that have moved past their prime. In this case, it is best to fertilize or amend the soil, as your early season crops may have depleted the soil of nutrients. An added benefit of gardening in the fall is it gives you a chance to experiment with what does and doesn't work without the blistering heat of summer.

If you have been putting off weeding chores in the garden, August is the time to finally get busy. That is because, as the growing season winds down, both annual and perennial weeds start to produce thousands of seeds that will germinate in your garden next spring. If left unchecked, these pesky invaders become extremely difficult to eliminate. The best time to weed is right after a rain when the soil is still moist. You can pull weeds by hand or use a hoe. Just be sure to remove the roots. Weeds such as crabgrass or purslane quickly regenerate from any root left in the soil. As soon as you have the weeds removed, cover the area with a thick layer of compost, straw, leaves, or shredded bark.

An extended growing season is one of the many benefits to gardening in Alabama. It may seem hard to imagine right now but knocking out a few easy tasks this month will quickly lead to harvesting your own leafy greens and vegetables for dinner on a crisp, cool evening- just a couple of months down the road!