

What To Do in January

Vegetables to Plant in Central Texas in January

By Jim Gober

The spring gardening season begins in January in Central Texas. Several cold-tolerant vegetable plants can be grown successfully during this time. When gardening in early spring in Central Texas, a bounty of fresh vegetables can be grown without the insect and disease problems you have once the weather warms in late spring.

1. Spinach is a crop harvested for its dark green leaves. Cook or eat the leaves fresh. For best results, start the spinach plants in well-drained containers indoors before setting them out in January. Soaking the seeds overnight in warm water before planting helps hasten the sprouting process. Harvest tender spinach leaves in January.
2. Carrots resist the coldest weather. Plant carrot seeds directly in the garden in January. The seed can take as long as 30 days to sprout. Thin the carrot plants to 2 to 3 inches apart for the largest healthiest carrots. When preparing the garden for carrots, loosen or pulverize the soil to a depth of at least 1 foot so the carrots are well formed. Rocks and garden debris can make the carrots grow into odd shapes.
3. Plant beet seeds directly into the garden in January in Central Texas. Beets produce seed clusters that contain several seeds rather than seeds that produce one plant. When the seeds begin to sprout you must thin to one plant per group for the largest beets. Eat the greens thinned from the planting area.
4. Plant broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower seed or transplants directly into the garden in January. Stagger the planting schedule by planting a few plants each week from January to mid-February to keep a fresh supply for up to two months. They have has a short shelf life, but can be frozen.
5. Purchase fresh onion sets. The best size for an onion set is the width of a pencil or slightly smaller. Large onion sets have a tendency to bolt or flower early. Onions that bolt have a shorter shelf life than other onions.
6. Lettuce can be grown in Central Texas in January because of its exceptional cold tolerance. It is usually eaten fresh and can be harvested as soon as the leaves are big enough to eat. The seed can be planted outdoors and begins sprouting within 10 days if the planting bed is kept moist. It is a good crop for children to grow because it is easy to grow with few pest problems.
7. Kale, chard, mustard greens and oriental greens can be grown in Central Texas in January because of its exceptional cold tolerance. Can be harvested as soon as the leaves are big enough to eat. The seed can be planted outdoors and begins sprouting within 10 days if the planting bed is kept moist.
8. Grow English peas and sugar snap peas in Central Texas in early spring. Plant the seeds outdoors in January. The peas will need a trellis for support unless they are a bush variety. Pea production should begin by the first of March in Central Texas, despite slow growth.

Tips to Manage Oak Wilt in Texas - Disease Management

Transporting unseasoned firewood from diseased red oaks is a potential means of spreading the oak wilt fungus. Oak wilt cannot be transmitted by burning infected firewood, but fungal mats may form on unseasoned firewood in storage. Presently, no vectors have been proven to transmit the fungus from live oaks to other oak trees, but diseased wood from any oak species should never be stored near healthy oak trees unless precautions are taken. It is best to purchase wood that has been thoroughly dried for at least one full year. If firewood from diseased trees is stored near healthy oak trees, it should be covered with clear plastic with the edges buried to prevent insects from leaving the pile.

Plant vegetable seeds: Radish. LATE JANUARY: Carrot, leek, leaf lettuce, parsnip, garden pea, rutabaga, spinach, shallot.

Plant vegetable plants: Artichoke crowns, asparagus crowns, broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi, lettuce, spinach LATE JANUARY: onion sets.

Plant herbs: Chervil, chives, cilantro, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, thyme.

Plant annual flower/ornamental seeds: Alyssum, calendula, cornflower, delphinium, echinacea (purple coneflower), feverfew, gaillardia, gayfeather, hollyhock, larkspur, Drummond's phlox, poppies, petunia, snapdragon, sweet pea.

Plant annual flower/ornamental plants: Sweet alyssum, bluebonnet plants, ornamental cabbage and kale, calendula, dianthus, Johnny jump-up, pansy, snapdragon, stock.

Plant perennial plants. Give newly planted plants some TLC before a freeze: water and add mulch, and even cover more tender varieties with a sheet or row cover. Plant a tree for the new year! Plant shrubs, vines, and other perennials.

Plant a tree for peace in the new year! Plant hardy shrubs and vines, as well.

Plant ground covers and borders.

Plant strawberries.

Plant bareroot (or containerized) fruit and pecan trees, berries, and grapes. Dig an ample hole so that the roots (of the bareroot plants) can be spread out. You may want to make a cone or a hill in the center of the hole so the bareroot plant can "sit" on top of the hill, and the roots can be spread out along the sides of the hill.

Mix a good quality compost in with the backfill. Sprinkle rock phosphate or bone meal into the hole so the roots touch it. Spread out the roots (of the bareroot plant) and fill the hole gently with the compost & soil mixture. Do not bury the trunk or expose the roots: keep the soil line at the same level as when the tree was grown. (Ask a knowledgeable nursery staff member where that line is, if it is not apparent at the time of purchase.)

Water immediately, and follow with a drench of seaweed solution. (Some folks prefer SuperThrive™ or another vitamin B-1 hormonal product to stimulate the roots.) It is helpful to water any new planting with one of these three root stimulators every time you water, for at least the first few weeks in its new home. Most fruit trees need a drastic pruning at the time of planting; again, consult a knowledgeable nursery staff member or a good book for more details.

Start tomato seeds indoors. If you have a heated greenhouse, a cold frame or supplemental plant lighting indoors, you can get a head start on starting tomatoes from seed. Normal interior lighting will not be enough. There are different schools of thought about what lighting method works best, however. A very sunny window (facing south, for example) can work, only if you rotate the seedlings daily so they don't reach for the window. If you choose to use supplemental lighting, place the florescent or grow lights no more than two to three inches above the seedlings, and raise them as the seedlings grow. A combination of florescent and tungsten lights are said to be close to full-spectrum lighting, or use full-spectrum bulbs or grow lights.

Clean, oil and repair tools. Scrape off any rust or debris, using steel wool or a wire brush, if necessary. Oil the metal parts with honing oil, WD-40, or clean motor oil. The wooden handle can be oiled with mineral or linseed oil. Some brands of tools, like Felco pruners, have replacement parts available if yours have been lost or worn out. Take the time to sharpen your blades, too. Take the lawnmower or other machinery to the shop for repairs.

Set up or repair your drip irrigation system.

Water beds, trees, and shrubs, as needed. If we haven't received at least

a one-inch rainfall in about six weeks, established trees and shrubs will need a deep soaking. Plantings less than two years in the ground will need watering more often, depending on your soil. Test the soil with your finger to determine water needs.

Fertilize asparagus, strawberries, and cool-weather annuals such as pansies. Use a bloom-promoting organic fertilizer, such as Rabbit Hill Farm's "Buds and Blooms." Add a good manure compost at the same time. Spray fruit trees (or other susceptible plants) with dormant oil. Dormant oil controls scale and other insects. Fruit trees (or any plant with a current infestation of scale) should be sprayed two or more times with dormant oil over the winter. Be sure to wait at least ten days after spraying any copper to spray dormant oil. Mixing the two can cause burning on the plant.

Last chance to prune grapes, fruit trees, or other plants for the dormant season.

Things warm up and buds begin to break in February, so plan your pruning in early January at the latest. The danger of pruning grapes too late is that the sap is running and the vine will "bleed" too much. Consult an extension service brochure, a good reference book, or an arborist before pruning. For Travis County Agricultural Extension Service information, call 854-9600. If you know how to use the internet, you are probably better at searching than I am. However, I did find some fairly good pruning information on the following websites:

www.tree-pruning.com ... This site has a good diagram of the branch bark ridge and the branch collar, tree anatomy you must know to prune a tree properly.

www.msue.msu.edu/vanburen/e-1935.htm ... This has grape pruning information from Michigan State University; ignore any varietal or chemical recommendations.

www.muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/hort/index.htm ... This contains a variety of guides for care and pruning of fruit trees and vines from the University of Missouri; ignore any varietal or chemical recommendations.

(Thanks to Howard Garrett's Texas Organic Gardening Book, the Travis County Master Gardener Association's Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity, and the staff of the Natural Gardener for some of this month's tips).