

THE HOME GARDEN IN DECEMBER

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DECEMBER is a very busy month for the home gardener, as there is much important work to be done. This includes thinning, weeding, hoeing, spraying, and planting out of late-autumn and winter greens such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and leeks and making successional sowings of dwarf and runner beans, beetroot, and, in some districts, swedes, parsnips, peas, carrots, and sweet corn.

IN the home garden where seasonal operations have been well planned there should be no difficulty in finding space for successional crops, but by the end of the month the garden should be filled to capacity with a wide range of newly-planted, growing, and maturing vegetable crops.

Where space is limited interplanting may be done. Quick-maturing vegetables such as lettuce, radish, and spinach are well suited for planting between rows of vegetables which take longer to mature. Cabbages, cauliflowers, and root crops may be planted between rows of maturing potatoes, peas, and beans, and pumpkins, cucumbers, and melons may be interplanted with sweet corn. Vegetable plants such as tomatoes, pepper, and egg plants which are subject to wind damage, especially when young, can be protected in exposed positions by planting them between maturing crops of peas or cabbage.

As earlier-sown crops mature and are harvested no time should be lost in digging the ground and preparing it for replanting, always remembering that crop rotation gives best results. Leaf crops such as cabbage, lettuce, silver beet, etc., should follow potatoes, parsnips, or other similar root crops, and root crops should follow leaf crops. Because both are affected by similar diseases, tomatoes and potatoes should not follow each other.

Successional sowings of salad crops such as lettuce, spring onions, and radish can be made, and turnips, swedes, and peas may be sown if a supply of moisture can be assured. In the North Island parsnips and sweet corn can still be sown, and tomatoes may be planted for late crops in the warmer districts which are not subject to early frosts.

Trenches and beds for celery should be prepared and plants set out. The plants should be kept sprayed with Bordeaux mixture or with certified copper oxychloride mixture to protect them from leaf spot, caused by the fungus *Septoria apii*, which is one of the most serious diseases affecting celery.



[Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd. photo.]
Where garden space is limited quick-growing vegetables like radish can be grown between rows of established crops.



[Green and Hahn Ltd. photo.]
Weeding and hoeing are necessary in December even among well-established crops. Hoeing assists aeration and conservation of soil moisture.

For summer sowing lettuce is best sown in a permanent bed and thinned, as transplanting is rather difficult in hot weather. From December until April all vegetables should be sown or planted on the flat, and subjects like cabbage, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, and leeks can have the earth drawn up to them as they grow. This method of planting is important during the drier and warmer months; it also provides a better surface for artificial watering and liquid manuring.

Weeding and hoeing are still very necessary even among well-established crops. Weeds not only rob plants of food and moisture, but they are often the host plants of disease and insect pests. Hoeing assists aeration and conservation of soil moisture.

Runner beans should be staked and tall varieties of tomatoes will require staking and pruning; in localities where blight is troublesome they should be sprayed with Bordeaux mixture or with a copper oxychloride spray to which has been added arsenate of lead or commercial D.D.T. wettable powder for the control of tomato worm.

Harvesting of main-crop rhubarb should now be discontinued and the plants allowed to develop leaf growth to enable the crown to build up supplies of reserve food for the production of next season's crop. Where heavy pulling of the stalks has been practised leaf growth will be stimulated by a dressing of blood and bone applied at the rate of 1 lb. per square yard between the plants and worked lightly in.

Liquid manure can be applied to most crops to advantage and where necessary watering or irrigation should be attended to. The supply of water is particularly important to the growth and setting of beans, to the growth of radish, lettuce, and celery, and, to a slightly less extent, to other growing vegetable crops. Crops of vegetables such as potatoes and onions that are nearing maturity should not be watered, as this is liable to start them into a second growth and to impair seriously their keeping qualities later.

Kumara plants will now be developing runners and these should be lifted occasionally to keep them from rooting at the nodes. If allowed to attach themselves to the soil, they make heavy vine growth at the expense of tubers. The soil should be kept moulded up to maintain the ridges in which the tubers form, and all weeds should be carefully removed.