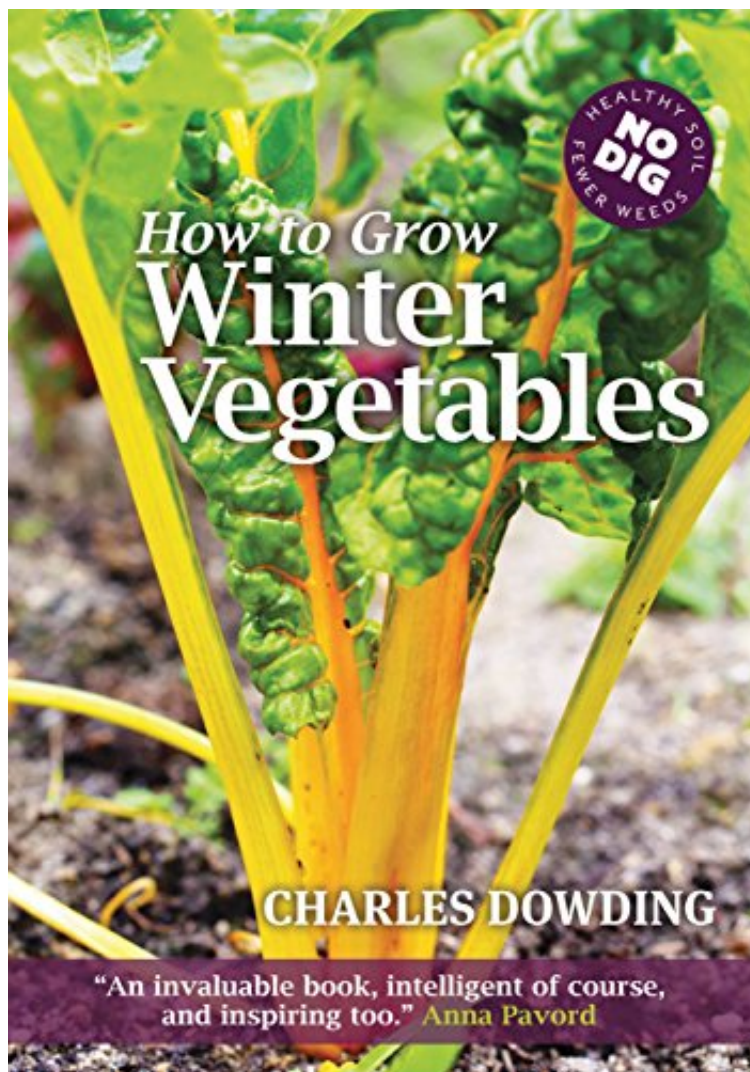


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How to Grow Winter Vegetables

by
Charles Dowding



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Synopsis

How to Grow Winter Vegetables shows that it is possible to enjoy an abundance of vegetables at the darkest time of year, whether stored or ready for harvesting when needed. It also covers growing for the hungry gap from April to early June. Not much grows in winter, but a well-organised plot may nonetheless be quite full. You need to plan carefully, and well ahead (as early as spring) for sowing and planting at specific times through the year, so the main part of the book is an extensive month-by-month sowing, planting and growing calendar. Further sections cover harvesting, from garlic in July right through to the last of the overwintered greens in May, and storing your produce. Many salads can be grown in winter, especially with a little protection from fleece, cloches or larger structures. The book includes a whole section on frost-hardy salad plants, explaining how to ensure harvests of fresh leaves throughout winter. The beauty of winter and its produce is captured in glorious photographs from the author's garden.

Look inside the book

How to Grow Winter Vegetables

How to Grow Winter Vegetables CHARLES DOWDING

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Cover image: 'Lusia' chicory, November. Back cover images: Left: 'Sanguina' beetroot, October. Middle: 'Ibis' celeriac, October. Right: 'Apex F1' Chinese cabbage, late November. Page 2: 'Sai Sai' leaf radish, November. Pages 10-11: 'Redbor F1' kale, December. Pages 28-9: 'Early Purple Sprouting' broccoli, late November. Pages 78-9: 'Barbosa' savoy cabbage, December. Pages 146-7: 'Tardiva' chicory hearting up in November. Pages 170-1: Softneck garlic hung to dry in a barn. Pages 186-7: Salad in December.

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Thanks to my family and especially Susie for their support. Edward's eyes were raised to the skies when I accepted the commission, and he remarked "We know where you'll be this winter." Thanks also to Amanda Cuthbert for the idea (after finding her plot annoyingly empty last winter), to Alethea Doran for incredibly thorough editing, and to all the team at Green Books.

To our Earth Mother, giving food when in repose.

Introduction
Welcome to the amazingly varied world of winter produce. This book sets out to widen your winter horizons, revealing the many vegetables that can be grown and enjoyed in the year's darker half. Fresh vegetables in winter are even more welcome than in summer – some green to alleviate the grey, and flavours that have been sweetened by frost. You can also enjoy stored harvests, for example, vegetables from sacks in the shed, or ropes of onion and garlic that have been stored under cover. Some of these vegetables take the main part of a year to grow and mature. Others can be sown after midsummer – even in September for winter salad – to grow indoors. I also aim to help you plan and practise a yearly cycle of gardening, so

that the harvests of your vegetables in the winter can match the harvests made in summer from the same ground. It is possible to keep sowing and planting through summer so that something is always growing and there is less 'feast or famine'. Many vegetables for winter eating can be slotted into a plot that is also producing regular meals in summer. Part 2 includes several chapters of background advice to do with soil and compost, the foundation of good gardening. Harvests are immeasurably better when plants are growing healthily in fertile soil. In Part 3 I offer the essential knowledge required to grow each vegetable, especially the best time to sow – vital information that is often overlooked. Sowing at the right time helps reduce losses from pests and diseases. The advice here should enable you to unleash the powerful combination of soil's ability to confer health to plants, and seeds' ability to launch into healthy growth once they have germinated at the most propitious moment. Parts 4 and 5 give advice on when and how to harvest your vegetables, either for immediate use or for storage – because harvesting and storing is as important as growing. I hope you will glean many tips here that are relevant to your soil (or growing medium) and the amount of time available to you, enabling you to grow healthy plants and harvest them at the best moment. Then you can enter winter with the warming knowledge that a tasty harvest is growing or is safely stored. Left: Spreading cow manure in December after a harvest of chicory hearts.

Chapter 1A forgotten season Making the most of winter's amazing possibilities Winter can offer vegetables in two ways: fresh harvests, such as leeks and salad leaves, and produce such as carrots and onions that have been stored from earlier harvests in the summer and autumn. Having these vegetables to hand can make a huge difference to one's health and well-being through the seemingly long months of cold and dark. The secret to having this produce in winter is to grow throughout the year and to start sowing as early as possible in the spring. Winter's two parts What do I mean by winter? A precise definition by time is difficult when the seasons overlap so much, and changes in the weather can sometimes make it feel like winter in October and also in April. This book covers the winter half-year, as opposed to the summer half-year, and I define it in two parts. True winter is under way by December, when growth is almost halted, and continues until March or even April, by which time daylight and some early warmth have returned, although there are still very few fresh vegetables to eat. Then, in April, May and even into June in a cold spring, there can be a long and frustrating wait for plants to grow and mature. Although the weather may be fine and warm, there is surprisingly little to eat from the garden, in a period known as the 'hungry gap' – a kind of 'second winter' in food terms. In the past this period was occasionally characterised by famine as people waited for the first new harvests, such as broad beans. This book will help you grow vegetables for true winter as well as for this hungry period, winter's shadow. You need to garden many months ahead, with sowings of purple sprouting broccoli in June, spring cabbages in August, broad beans in October or November and spinach in early March, all for harvests in the hungry gap. You will also find lots of advice on helping vegetables survive winter in better shape and then grow strongly again in the spring. A cover of netting, barely visible, can be enough to lessen the effects of frost, wind and snow so that plants endure when they would otherwise have perished. Using fleece in the spring brings growth forwards dramatically. Both of these are simple to use and cheap to buy. Right: 'Cavolo Nero' kale in early December. Swede, lamb's lettuce and purple sprouting broccoli – for harvesting over a long period. Summer & winter vegetables contrasted Growing vegetables in summer is a busier activity than in winter, partly because winter vegetables need to be sown, planted and weeded in summer. If the summer is wet and the tomatoes are poor, at least your winter vegetables will

be growing well. Periods of harvest

An important difference between summer and winter vegetables is that in summer many plants – such as courgettes, runner beans and tomatoes – offer repeated harvests over a long period. Continual summer warmth encourages harvests from the same plants for some time. This can result in summer gluts, and perhaps even some complacency, because winter harvests do not repeat, or do so only slowly. In fact, most winter vegetables, such as cabbage hearts, leeks and parsnips, offer one harvest only. There is little new growth in winter, so it needs to have happened in spring, summer and autumn. During all this preparation time – as long as six to eight months – the gardener is busy but unrewarded until the season of harvest finally arrives. Fortunately there are also some fast-growing winter vegetables to sow in summer, such as salads, kale and turnips, which fill the gaps left after summer harvests. The sowing calendar in Part 3 has as much to say about July to October as it does about March to June.

Summer weather for winter harvests

Summer weather plays an important part in growing for winter, and it helps to be aware of a marked difference in the weather needed for different plants. For instance, most summer vegetables grow fast, offer their harvests in fine weather and do best in seasons of plentiful warmth, without too many long periods of rain and damp. However, in Britain at least, the weather does not always behave like that, so tomatoes can be blighted, beans may rot and sweetcorn may not ripen before winter arrives. These are all immensely discouraging experiences. After a wet August, leeks and kale of many varieties are flourishing. Under the fleece is Chinese cabbage. But all is not lost: at the same time, summers of cool, damp weather are excellent for many winter vegetables. We cannot predict weather in advance but, by growing a range of vegetables that have different likes and dislikes, the chances of success are generally increased. A damp Atlantic climate is actually as good for many winter vegetables as it is tricky for many summer ones, so if you live in such an area this book has much to offer!

Take advantage of cool, wet summers & autumns

Brussels sprouts, leeks and parsnips thrive in wet summers – indeed, they are often healthier in these conditions, with less rust on leeks and fewer caterpillars eating the sprout plants. - Wet Augusts are superb for sowing and growing many winter salads. - Damp, soggy autumns help plants to carry on growing by lessening early frost.

A mild late January. From left: broad beans emerging, leaf beet, purple sprouting broccoli; and garlic.

Garden ahead for winter

The best harvests for winter are achieved by good soil preparation and sowing the first seeds as soon as winter ends.

Best sowing dates

Many vegetables grow quite slowly, and some sowings for winter, such as celeriac and parsnip, need to be made as early as March. Every month has a 'best time' for sowing at least one winter vegetable, so it is not a matter of popping all your seeds in at once. Kale and savoy cabbage can be sown as late as June; indeed they often grow more healthily if sown slightly later than is recommended on the seed packet.

July and August are busy times for sowing winter salads, so I recommend that you make a note in your calendar of the timings given in Part 3, in order to be prepared with seeds when they will have the best chance of growing you a good harvest.

Making soil fertile

The other aspect of being prepared for winter is the condition of the soil in your plot – how healthy and fertile it is. Good soil grows great vegetables, and I give advice on how to achieve this, mainly in Chapters 3 and 4. My speciality is growing without digging, and there are lots of tips here for managing this, but if you enjoy digging you can skip over the no-dig parts of Chapter 3 and concentrate on the rest of the book. I also garden without using any packet fertiliser or synthetic sprays, and have evolved methods of treating soil and growing vegetables that have more chance of working in an organic garden or allotment. In order to avoid dealing with unexpected problems and coping with disappointing losses, I suggest that you familiarise yourself with the potential pitfalls of pests and diseases, then garden in a way to minimise the risk of

encountering them. That is the philosophy behind all my advice, and I trust it will help your growing to be successful, with less need for artificial inputs.

Stored foodIn addition to delicious fresh harvests from the garden, a great deal of winter food can be stored, either in the house or in a cool, dry place outdoors.

An indoor larderWhen your winter vegetables have grown to maturity there will be a long period of harvest. This is divided into two parts. In the first you are harvesting vegetables to store – starting as early as July, with garlic maturing. In the second part you are harvesting fresh from the garden, throughout winter. Two things stand out here.

The first is to harvest each vegetable at its best time so that it comes out of the soil in a healthy state. For example, garlic will sprout if left in the ground too long and then won't keep so well, while potatoes may be infected by blight or eaten by slugs. See the monthly calendar in Chapter 10 for advice on the harvest requirements of each vegetable.

The second is how best to store each harvest made during summer and autumn, and even sometimes in winter. Each vegetable has slightly different requirements for keeping: some keep better in the warmth of a house; some in cool but frost-free darkness; others in a cold outdoor environment, just sheltered from the rain. All this is explained in Part 5.

An outdoor larderThere is one thing that no stored vegetables can offer: fresh, green leaves, always welcome at a time when any fresh food is so scarce.

Swedes, leeks and chicory still to harvest at the turn of the year. Dig/no-dig experiment in the beds behind. These 'White Gem' parsnips were dug after a week of severe frost. Snow had kept the soil soft.

Storing in situSome root vegetables, especially swedes and parsnips, store well in the soil. They are high-value food – indeed parsnips were a main winter staple before the arrival of potatoes. Once germinated (the tricky part) parsnips are relatively easy to grow, extremely easy to store for the winter, in the soil they grew in, and their flavour improves with each cold snap as starches turn to sugar. Other winter vegetables do not benefit so much from cold weather but still survive it.

Success at harvesting leaves such as kale and salad, as well as green vegetables such as Brussels sprouts, depends on three things: the weather, which we cannot control; our choice of suitable varieties, and growing them well enough that they have more ability to withstand severe weather; any protection we can give them.

When this goes well, the plot or garden can serve as a food store for gathering leaves off the same plants, over a long period. See Chapter 11 for tips on better ways of picking so that plants are able to continue producing for longer, often into spring.

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Charles Dowding's Veg Journal: Expert no-dig advice, month by month, Organic Gardening: The Natural No-Dig Way, Gardening Myths and Misconceptions (Wise words Book 3), How to Create a New Vegetable Garden: Producing a beautiful and fruitful garden from scratch, Salad Leaves for All Seasons: Organic Growing from Pot to Plot, Grow Bag Gardening: The Revolutionary Way to Grow Bountiful Vegetables, Herbs, Fruits, and Flowers in Lightweight, Eco-friendly Fabric Pots - Perfect For: ... Balconies & Rooftops. Grow Anywhere!, The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener: How to Grow Your Own Food 365 Days a Year, No Matter Where You Live, The Winter Harvest Handbook: Year Round Vegetable Production Using Deep-Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses, Growing Under Cover: Techniques for a More Productive, Weather-Resistant, Pest-Free Vegetable Garden, The Vegetable Grower's Handbook: Unearth Your Garden's Full Potential, Four-Season Harvest: Organic Vegetables from Your Home Garden All Year Long: Organic Vegetables from Your Home Garden All Year Long, 2nd Edition, Think Like An Ecosystem: An Introduction to Permaculture, Water Systems, Soil Science and Landscape Design, The New Organic Grower, 3rd Edition: A Master's Manual

of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener, 30th Anniversary Edition, The Living Soil Handbook: The No-Till Grower's Guide to Ecological Market Gardening, Grow Food For Free: The sustainable, zero-cost, low-effort way to a bountiful harvest, The Regenerative Grower's Guide to Garden Amendments: Using Locally Sourced Materials to Make Mineral and Biological Extracts and Ferments, The Intelligent Gardener: Growing Nutrient-Dense Food (Mother Earth News Books for Wiser Living), Groundbreaking Food Gardens: 73 Plans That Will Change the Way You Grow Your Garden, The Chinese Greenhouse: Design and Build a Low-Cost, Passive Solar Greenhouse (Mother Earth News Wiser Living Series)

What people say about this book

Beatrix, "Great Book! Not quite right for my growing area, but a good reference.. I loved all the details about each plant's requirements. I wish that the recommendations about timing were more about light and temperature and moisture, rather than say, March, or May, or whatever works for Charles Dowding in his specific region. For example, knowing when peas sprout or flower or fruit or stop doing any of those activities moisture- or temperature-wise is more helpful than knowing what month is a good month for him to do those things. I live in an area dominated by microclimates! That said, I learned a lot about many winter vegetables, and have much more courage to try growing them now."

Mom's in the Garden, "A Hidden Gem. While I have quite a collection of books about winter vegetable gardening, I turn to this book a lot for advice on timing. This is the best organized manual I have seen on how to grow crops for eating in the winter. The author gives specific, practical advice for what to do each month for each vegetable: preparing, planting (including spacing for best results, giving you a range), care, and special concerns. He also has helpful charts for at-a-glance help. He's been a market gardener for many years and it shows. I'm surprised this book isn't more popular. My guess is that it is because the author lives in the UK and the book hasn't been promoted in the US. I've found the author's timing and culture recommendations work very well for my mid-Atlantic garden as long as I keep in mind that his winters are a bit milder than mine, and his climate is usually more rainy and cooler in the summer. If you live in the South, you will need to grow short-day onions (he grows long-day onions), and the timing will be different."

readalot, "GREAT REFERENCE and must have book even here in USA.. Great reference. Mr. Dowding's market garden is in zone 8 so it is quite applicable even here in US. After reading this, you wonder why you didn't plant vegetables for winter harvest and for spring "hunger gap". We run a small farm and sell at local farmers market and it still has wealth of information even for those of us with years of experience. And if you are new or novice at gardening, Mr. Dowding really makes it easy for you to understand, when to plant and when to harvest. And I do love his writing style. Don't turn over the soil no matter how great your temptation is. And do use insect netting for brassicas."

Toni, "My go to book of advice. This is a wonderful book. Very organized, easy to follow, complete guide to growing winter vegetables. Charles adds a very pleasant writing style with tips and tricks and things that he tried that did not work so well for him. I find this the first book I reach for in guidance."

M. Carroll, "Great guide for veg gardening!. Love this book"

C Greve, "Great book!. I'm very pleased with this book. It has beautiful color photos to help identify the plants. Im looking forward to trying some of the great ideas in it. I would recommend this book."

Peggy, "Five Stars. I love the way this man thinks, and his advice is top notch."

Miriam Gaddis, "Great Info.. Loads of great info. Have started my Fall/Winter Garden already!"

Ian Stewart, "More crops, less work.. Really well written. Most importantly, this is not one of those books where the same old"traditional"advice is trotted out. Charles has done extensive trials and kept comprehensive records and THAT is what makes his books so valuable. For instance, I spent 15 years following the accepted wisdom that ground needs digging and that compost and muck must be dug into the soil. That is rubbish.I tried the no dig, surface mulching method - and it works! Not just that, but with far better results!No more double digging for me. Far fewer weeds. Bigger and better crops. Thank you Charles! By the way, he has really good videos on YouTube as well and watching those inspired me to give it a go. Try it yourself. You won't be disappointed."

C Hobbes, "Excellent book. Really practical with lots of great tips for times of sowings,suitable crops and growing methods to help garden over winter,but actually it's really useful for summertime too to help you plan ahead so you don't run out of plants later in the year.Wish I had got this book sooner!"

David Redgate, "Can't fault this book.. Spring, summer, autumn and winter, this man can grow veg. Anytime. What an eye opener. Very Well done Charles Dowding."

C Smith, "Everything you need to know about growing winter greens. Best varieties, sowing and planting times and loads of tips - advice gleaned from a lifetime of growing winter salads and greens. A wonderful resource. Invaluable if you want to keep your plot producing through the winter. Charles Dowding is an inspiration!"

The book by Charles Dowding has a rating of 5 out of 4.7. 203 people have provided feedback.

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