Winter Gardening

We can eat fresh food from the garden all winter long in the Pacific Northwest. And the best part? You don’t even need to water your winter garden!

How does it work?
Successful winter gardening is all about space and timing! Most plants that we eat over the winter are not actually growing during winter. We grow these plants to a mature size in the late summer and fall, and then during the winter, we slowly harvest them – using the cool outdoor temperatures like a natural fridge, and gaining the benefits of having living, fresh food in the winter.

Start making plans for your Winter garden in June. Check out West Coast Seeds Winter Gardening Guide and Planting Chart for guidelines and timing for winter crops (www.westcoastseeds.com - under Gardening Resources).

What can I grow? So much!
Most plants in the brassica family have a natural cold-hardiness that allows them to survive even hard frosts and below freezing temperatures. Overwintering broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts and kale are all great choices for the winter garden.

Most root crops are also a good bet for overwintering, especially if you mulch the soil over them: Carrots, beets, parsnips, turnips, and rutabagas are all root crops that will keep all winter long in well-drained soil, especially with some dead leaves or straw protecting the surface of the soil from frost.

Protect your plants over the winter
Some plants need a bit of protection in the form of clear covers. Plants like spinach, lettuce and swiss chard will do much better over winter if they are in a greenhouse or even a simple cloche.

What is a cloche? A cloche is a very simple form of protection for your garden. They are made by creating half circles, often with flexible plastic tubing covered with sturdy, transparent plastic (but get creative, you can use many different materials to make a frame!). This protects the plants from wind and cooling rain or snow, and every time the sun comes out the soil warms up a few degrees under the cloche and allows the plants to grow a bit.

Always remember, under a cloche, plants are relying on moisture in the soil and no rain is getting through. If the sun shines for a long period, make sure to check your cloche as the soil might dry out.