

The Garden \$aver

June is upon us. That likely means that most of your garden is planted. If not, don't worry. There is still time to plant summer crops such as cucumbers, green beans, okra, peppers, tomatoes, squash, sweet potatoes, zucchini, and other favorites. Try to get seeds and plants in the ground by mid-June if you are able. The sooner they get into the ground before really hot weather sets in, the better. Good luck!

Vegetables That Take the Heat

Some vegetables are made for summer in Missouri. Below are a few local favorites. Most of these are well-known in the South. They can be planted in May and June for a harvest later in the summer.

- ❖ **Okra:** When okra gets going, watch out. During the heat of summer, check plants every day and harvest when pods are 3 inches. Use scissors. Okra comes from Western Africa, Ethiopia, or South Asia.
- ❖ **Black-eyed peas:** Related to southern peas and crowder peas, these West-African plants thrive in our summers. Harvest pods early to use like green beans or wait until the peas plump up. Remove them from the pod and boil them. Added bonus: these plants enrich the soil!
- ❖ **Lima beans:** These come in bush and pole varieties. Pole varieties will vine and need to grow up a fence. They are grown for the beans inside the pods, so let them plump up or dry before harvesting. They come from the Andes (northern Peru) and Central America.
- ❖ **Hot peppers:** Most hot peppers will produce a large number of peppers on one plant. To keep them from falling over, use small tomato cages or stick a post in the ground and tie them up. They come from Mexico and have spread across the globe.
- ❖ **Sweet potatoes:** See our sweet potato handout or go to <http://bit.ly/1sxJiKG> for more information.

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange carries many vegetable varieties that take the heat. More at <http://bit.ly/1s4OMN3>.

Summer Garden Survival

The toughest gardening months in Missouri are generally July and August. It can get very hot and humid, and the rain may be scarce. Below are some tips to prepare you for summer and help you beat the heat.

- **Use compost:** We've said it before and we'll probably keep saying it. One benefit of mixing compost into the soil is that it helps the soil hold water. It acts like a sponge, keeping water in the soil and helping plants get through tough times.
- **Use mulch:** Mulch is any organic material like straw, hay, leaves, or grass clippings that is spread on the surface of the soil to keep weeds down and hold in water. Use a 2-4 inch layer around plants or throughout the whole garden.
- **Water:** If it doesn't rain 1-2 inches a week, you'll need to give the garden some water. Water deeply with an overhead sprinkler in the morning. Soaker hoses work well too - <http://bit.ly/1WD7JDN>.

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Better Gardening through Cover Crops

Cover crops are plants grown to improve the soil and keep weeds from growing. They can be used to fill in bare patches in the garden when you may not know what to plant next. Some cover crops produce food you can eat, but they are typically grown strictly for the benefit of the soil. Cover cropping is like growing your own compost in the garden. The practice adds nutrients to the soil and can improve the soil's texture.

Cover crop tips

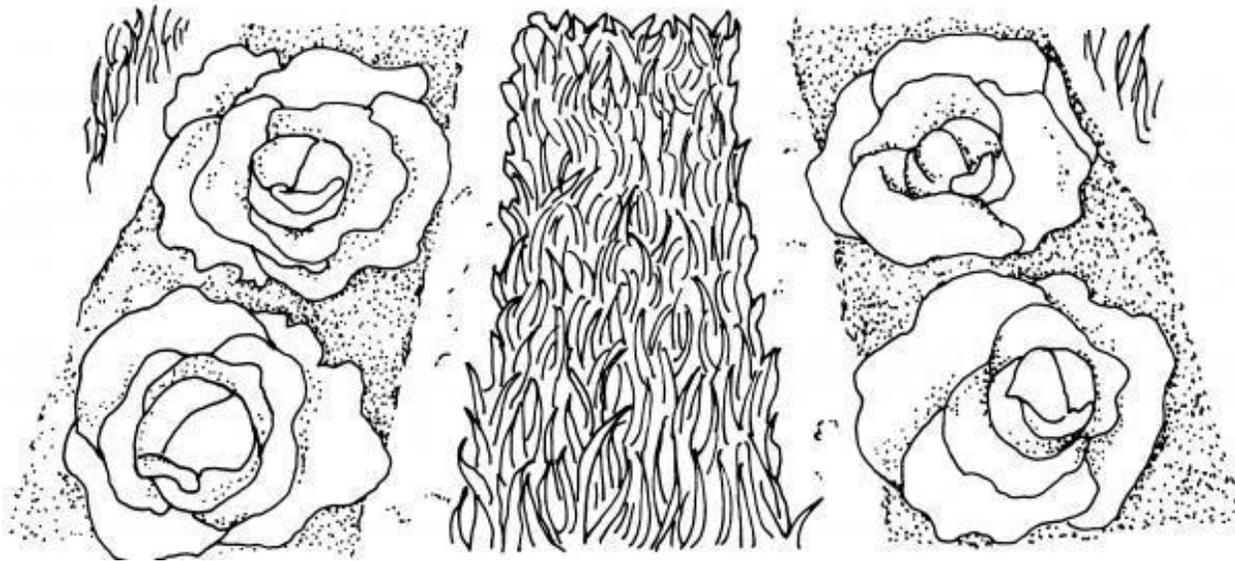
Mustard and **black-eyed peas** are two cover crops that work well in home gardens. Mustard is planted in the spring and fall. Black-eyed peas in the summer and fall.

- 1.) Start by removing all of the plants and weeds from the space you want to cover crop. Use a hoe or other tool to chop up the top few inches of soil. Scatter the cover crop seed over the soil and use a hoe or rake to cover them. Stand back and let it grow.
- 2.) For home gardens, cover crops work best in bare patches of the garden in the late summer and fall. Simply let them grow and die naturally when winter sets in.

In the spring, you have a couple of options:

- 1.) Leave the plant material on the surface of the soil and use it like mulch. Spread it to the side when planting seeds or transplants.
- 2.) Rake up the plant material and add it to a compost pile. When the soil is dry enough, you can then do some light tilling, turning, or chopping to prepare your bed.

Try it for a couple of years. You'll be surprised by your new and improved soil.



Cover crop growing between vegetables - from NC State University Extension Gardener Handbook