

Fall Planting Guide for Southern Arizona: Zone 9b

A helpful guide for beginner gardeners in the Sonoran Desert

By Garden Social

Welcome to your fall gardening adventure in Southern Arizona's Zone 9b! Imagine crunchy carrots, leafy greens, and the sweet scent of fresh herbs drifting on a crisp autumn breeze. With a few simple steps, you'll have a colorful, delicious harvest and maybe even a little dirt under your nails to show for it.

Understanding Zone 9b Climate

Zone 9b means mild winters and comfy autumns—perfect for planting! Days are still warm (think 80s and 90s °F), while nights are pleasantly cool. The soil may be a bit stubborn, but that's nothing a gardener's persistence (and compost!) can't fix.

Soil Preparation and Garden Planning

- Soil Amendment: Add compost or well-rotted manure for healthy, happy plants.
- Mulching: Mulch with straw or leaves to keep soil cozy and moist.
- Irrigation: Try drip irrigation or soaker hoses for precise watering.
- Plot Rotation: Rotate crops each year for a resilient, pest-resistant garden.

What to Plant and When

Mid to Late September

Start your garden party with these cool-weather treats:

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Brussels Sprouts
- Carrots
- Beets
- Turnips
- Radishes
- Lettuce
- Spinach
- Kale
- Collard Greens
- Swiss Chard

Start seeds indoors in late August for transplants, or direct-sow seeds when nighttime temperatures consistently drop below 75°F (24°C).

Early to Mid October

As autumn paints the desert with gold, plant these:

- Onion sets
- Garlic cloves
- Peas (snap, snow, and shelling)
- Fava beans
- Asian greens (bok choy, tatsoi, mizuna)
- Mustard greens

Onions and garlic are your long-haul crops—they'll reward your patience come late spring!

Late October to Early November

Keep the fun going with:

- Parsnips
- Rutabagas
- Another round of carrots, beets, and radishes for non-stop snacks

This is also the perfect time to plant perennial herbs like oregano, thyme, rosemary, and sage.

Herbs for the Fall Garden

Plant these fragrant kitchen helpers for year-round flavor:

- Cilantro
- Parsley
- Dill
- Chives
- Fennel

Perennials enjoy the mild winter and set strong roots for spring.

Cover Crops and Soil Health

Give your soil some TLC with cover crops:

- Legumes: Clover, vetch, or field peas fix nitrogen and boost fertility.
- Grasses: Annual ryegrass or oats keep weeds at bay.
- Mixes: Combine legumes and grasses for super soil benefits.

Chop and mix cover crops into the soil before spring planting for a rich, fluffy bed.

Tips for Success

- Check soil moisture: Water as needed—cactus won't be jealous!
- Fertilize: Feed your plants with organic fertilizer at planting and leafy boosters mid-season.
- Frost protection: Rare, but row covers or frost cloth mean no surprises.
- Succession planting: Plant every two weeks for non-stop harvests.
- Pest patrol: Watch for aphids, leaf miners, and caterpillars—row covers keep them guessing.

Fruits for the Autumn Garden

While most fruit trees wait for late winter, you can plant berries and grapes this fall. Try pomegranates, figs, mulberries, and prickly pears—they love the desert sun and reward you with sweet treats!

- Pomegranates
- Figs
- Mulberries
- Prickly pears

Resources for Southern Arizona Gardeners

- University of Arizona Cooperative Extension: Local planting calendars, soil testing, and pest help.
- Arizona Master Gardeners: Gardening classes and advice from friendly pros.
- Local nurseries: Find regionally adapted varieties and expert tips.
- Garden Social: Local horticulture engagement, hands-on learning and educational landscape/gardening services.

Conclusion

Gardening in Southern Arizona's Zone 9b is a colorful journey filled with flavor, fragrance, and fun. With the right timing and a playful approach, your autumn garden will burst with life—just add seeds, sun, and a sprinkle of imagination. Happy fall planting!

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