

## Seasonal Gardening Tips for December

Our long, hot humid summers extend from December through March. This is the most challenging time of year to grow food and maintain a garden. Yet the [heat](#) and [wet weather](#) are also highly productive. By being prepared and with good planning, you can enjoy an abundant harvest without too much effort. Follow my [Subtropical Planting Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of what to plant when and garden tasks throughout the year. The [Vegetables Growing Guide](#) summarises 68 of the most popular vegetables to grow in Australia and New Zealand climate zones. It includes information on companion planting, making compost, soil and moon planting. You may find these useful reference tools for [growing an abundant garden](#).



### Challenges during Summer

As the humidity and temperatures increase, [pests](#), diseases and [weeds](#) grow in number too! [Fruit flies](#), grasshoppers, [aphids and ants](#), [caterpillars](#), slugs, snails, whitefly, scale, leaf miners and citrus gall wasps, powdery mildew, sooty mould and black spot are some of the most common problems. It can feel like an uphill battle! So a variety of preventative and maintenance strategies are needed to keep these in check! The heat also makes it uncomfortable to be outdoors. So try to get out early or late in the day during the cooler temperatures to [plant](#), [water](#) and [maintain your garden](#).

### Tips to Protect your Crops

- **Build [healthy soil](#).** Plants that are nutrient-deficient, water or heat-stressed are most likely to come under attack. [Pests](#) and diseases target weak or damaged plants. So, remineralising your soil and providing trace elements with liquid seaweed are some easy ways to prevent attack and strengthen your plants. Check your soil pH, maintain moisture and recycle nutrients in your kitchen and garden waste to make [compost](#). This is a sustainable way to feed your soil and grow resilient plants.
- **Encourage beneficial insects** into your garden to pest manage for you. By [sowing flowers](#) and allowing your ornamental plants, vegetables and herbs to go to flower, you provide nectar and pollen for predatory insects like [hoverflies](#) and ladybirds who feed on [aphids](#), scale and mealybugs. [Mitate nature](#) – you can't go wrong! Avoid using any chemicals to attract helpful predators like praying mantids, dragonflies, assassin bugs, spiders and parasitic wasps. These insects take care of a wide variety of pests including grasshoppers, [caterpillars](#) and sapsuckers.
- Use **crop covers** like shade cloth, a shade house, bird-safe exclusion netting, row covers and individual fruit bags to protect from flying insects, birds and other hungry animals. You may have to get creative!
- **Grow in containers.** Move your plants under cover in hot, wet or stormy weather. Edibles in [pots](#) are portable, easier to protect and maintain, and use less water.



### Easy ways to Maintain a Garden Bed over Summer

If it's all in the 'too hard basket' and you need a break, you may want to consider taking some garden zones out of play during summer. Here are a few options:

- **Build your soil** – then set and forget. Add a layer of organic matter like aged manure or garden green waste and rock minerals to a garden bed you want to reinvigorate. **Mulch** thickly over the top after watering in. Allow summer rain and heat to break it all down ready for planting next season. Bury food scraps and allow

the worms and microbes to decompose them for you! You may even end up with some bonus self-sown crops from the food 'waste' with little or no work.

- Grow a **living ground cover** like [sweet potatoes](#) or [pumpkins](#) to minimise weeds while giving you food. Sow a few sprouting sweet potatoes or plant some runners. These vine crops are thick and very effective at keeping weeds at bay while also flowering. They provide tender green shoots for salads and stir-fries, and delicious tubers and fruit.
- **Grow a warm season green manure** to enrich the soil for planting and suppress weeds. There are many [suitable seeds](#) you can sow as a cover crop over a garden bed or larger area. Chop the crop back before flowering to add valuable minerals to the soil. Some varieties also act as a biofumigant to remediate soil infested with nematodes. You can lightly turn these into the top layer of the soil to [compost](#) or leave in situ as a [mulch](#). Then you'll be ready to plant into replenished soil.



*Grow Sweet Potato as a living ground cover*

### Leafy Greens and Homegrown Salad Ingredients

Just when we crave salads, many of our favourite leafy greens are challenging to grow. Quite a few lettuce varieties [bolt to seed](#) in the heat, as does [rocket](#) if grown in the wrong position. Here are a few ideas for keeping leafy greens on your menu during summer.

1. **Sow heat-tolerant pick 'n' pluck lettuce cultivars.** Forget hearted varieties – they bolt too easily! Try 'Marvel of Four Seasons', 'Freckles', 'Salad Bowl Green', 'Buttercrunch'; 'Royal Oakleaf' (my favourite), 'Green Mignonette' and 'Lollo Rossa' which are adapted for heat and humidity. In summer, I sow lettuces where they receive early morning sunlight and dappled light or under 50% shade cloth during the day. Create a suitable [microclimate](#) in a self-watering pot to prevent them bolting to seed or use a shade cover. Lettuce needs consistent water daily.
2. **Pick young tender shoots and leaves from vegetables.** New sweet potato leaves, baby beetroot and pumpkin, chard, spinach, sorrel, mustard and kale leaves are ideal to add to salads when small. Sorrel is an excellent hardy perennial.
3. **Grow summer spinach varieties.** Aibika, Brazilian Spinach, Ceylon or Malabar Spinach, Cranberry Hibiscus, Egyptian Spinach, Kangkong, Lagos Spinach, Lebanese Cress, Moringa, New Zealand Spinach or Warrigal Greens, Okinawa Spinach, Sambung Nyawa and Suranim Spinach are a few heat-loving varieties to try. Young Asian green leaves too!
4. **Grow [microgreens](#).** These baby leaf herbs and vegetables are delicious, highly nutritious, quick to harvest from seed to feed in just 7-21 days, depending on the variety. You don't have to worry about the heat of summer outdoors. You can [sow seeds](#) and raise into baby leaf greens on your kitchen bench or a sunny indoor windowsill. So easy. Check out these helpful resources to get started: [Microgreens Growing Guide](#) and [Easy Guide to Growing Microgreens Booklet](#). Simple to follow instructions, FAQ + more.



### Garden Tasks

- Check fruit fly traps. After rain, they become particularly active! Re-bait as necessary.
- Harvest fruits and vegetables regularly in hot humid conditions before they rot or are attacked.
- After rain, when soil is moist, add compost or slow-release fertiliser and rock minerals to replenish nutrients that have leached. Water in or time your fertilising before more rain and cover with mulch.

- Check [mulch](#) levels on pots and garden beds. [Mulch](#) helps minimise moisture loss and weed growth, while adding nutrients to [build soil health](#).
- Install protective crop covers over garden beds. They help prevent damage from high temperatures, drying or destructive winds, heavy rain and hail during storms.
- Fertilise your citrus trees. They fruit most of the year and have a high need for nutrients during summer.
- Add a bird bath for your wildlife and shallow bee bath for pollinators.

### Resources and Articles

- 🌱 [The Benefits of Moon Gardening – How to work with moon cycles](#)
- 🌱 [List of 75+ Drought Tolerant Foods for Dry Climates](#)
- 🌱 [Subtropical Planting Guide – What to Plant and When](#)
- 🌱 [Garden Journal Planner and Workbook](#)
- 🌱 [Guide to Understanding Microclimates in Your Garden](#)
- 🌱 [Tips to Grow Food in Hot, Dry or Windy Weather](#)
- 🌱 [18 Top Tips for Gardening in Dry Climate Conditions](#)
- 🌱 [6 Tips for Abundant Edible Container Gardens](#)
- 🌱 [Easy Food Gardening Guide for Beginners](#)
- 🌱 [9 Strategies to Help Combat Common Edible Garden Problems](#)
- 🌱 [Top Tips for Wet Weather Gardening](#)
- 🌱 [How to Restore Waterlogged Pot Plants](#)



### Need Help?

If you want to feel more confident rather than frustrated and unprepared, or just need a helping hand with one-on-one personalised expert advice and support for your garden, consider my [live chat coaching call](#) or [onsite garden consultation service](#). I'd love to help you maximise space, provide design ideas and tailor advice to what you need. Read [what a few of my onsite clients say](#) and feedback from my [live chat clients](#).

Check out [Gift Vouchers](#) and the [Shop](#) for a range of sustainable gifts and gardening guides.

Until next time, enjoy the harvest and wishing you a safe and happy festive season!

Cheers, Anne



[The Micro Gardener](#)