

## High temperature veggies

When high temperatures hit the Mojave, most people think about spending an afternoon anywhere but standing outside, even if it is in a garden. We experience such high heat and low humidity, that it is difficult to think of what would possibly grow in July or August.

Sadly, many people have only their gardening experience in other environments, which frequently leads to serious disappointment. In northern areas, tomatoes go into the ground by the beginning of June or sometimes later. Some of those places can experience snowfall as late as May, hence the need to wait. Here, we must plant tomatoes by the beginning of April or we are likely to have fruit that looks as if it were poached on the vine – completely inedible.

There are other vegetables, however, and some of them not only survive a Mojave summer, they might even thrive in it. They can be fussy about water and fertilizer, but most of the garden plants we enjoy have similar requirements.

Members of the melon family are usually reliable through the summer. This family is well represented among vegetable garden plants. Cucumbers are not necessarily the most reliable in hot weather, but others are.

The following should be planted when the soil is warm. Cool soils impede growth, water and fertility uptake. If you do not have a soil thermometer, wait until nighttime temperatures are about 65°F, or a little higher.

Cantaloupe and watermelon thrive in the heat, if there is sufficient irrigation and the soil



is both warm and fertile. The plants appreciate a little compost and some bone meal to assist with water uptake. If a specific variety



comes from Europe or Asia, it might benefit from a little shade, even a 10 percent shade cloth to protect it from the worst of the summer sun.

Squashes and pumpkins are in this family, and they succeed when many other vegetables fail. Again, as long as the soil is warm and amended with compost, they flourish. Pumpkins are generally ready to harvest by Halloween; how convenient!

These are not the only options for the hot weather garden. Other delights will grow merrily until the fall. Hot peppers tend to be more tolerant of summer than sweet ones. Okra is the key to good gumbo, so I have been told. In a vegetable garden, it has attractive features. First, it must not be planted until the soil has become warm. It is an attractive plant, with lovely flowers that look much like hollyhocks. The leaves are fairly large, which means it will need regular watering. Finally, it is fast to develop fruit. Some varieties take as little as

seven weeks from seed to fruit, which should be picked when they are no more than three inches long.

Sweet potatoes will grow very well from slips or even from burying half of one. Hot weather is not a problem, although water might be. A little shade will keep the leaves from scorching until they are ready to harvest – around Thanksgiving.

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