

Fall Opportunities for Direct Marketing Produce

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Introduction


Across the nation the growing interest in local food has resulted in an extension of the direct market produce season well beyond the end of summer. Many tailgate markets, farmers' markets, and roadside stands are now in operation through the Christmas holiday season. This is a wonderful opportunity for some farmers to extend their growing and marketing seasons. Many of the crops listed below will grow in the open field late into the season. Row covers and high tunnels can be used for more sensitive crops.


Redesigning your roadside stand or tailgate display for late season sales can be fun. Fall vegetables and other agricultural products are colorful and eye-catching. Think red, yellow and orange. Think of how much you enjoy catching a whiff of fresh cinnamon and try to provide that if you can, maybe by offering free hot mulled cider. And do what you can to provide some shelter from the wind and rain to make the shopping experience more pleasant. Customers are looking for decorating ideas, so be sure to give them examples and supply all the accessories they will need to copy what you have done, e.g., paint and carving kits for gourds and pumpkins, wooden stakes to support corn stalks and scarecrows, and some seasonal ribbons and bows. To encourage customers to buy vegetables they are not familiar with, have easy to produce recipe cards available using your family's favorites.


You should start planning now for what you want to grow for sale in the fall. Here are ideas to get your imagination going. Check your local extension service publications for the best times to plant these items to have them ready for your fall sales season.

Here are some traditional and some novel products that you can grow and sell in the fall!

 **Pumpkins:** Nothing says autumn like pumpkins and there are so many different kinds that you can grow and display. A must have is the traditional jack o' lantern for Halloween, but also consider growing pie pumpkins, white pumpkins, and a few of the many heirloom pumpkins that come in many different shapes and colors. Examples of heirloom pumpkins include "Long Island Cheese" and "Seminole". Pumpkins are usually planted in mid-June to mid-July in eastern NC and late May to end of June in western NC.

 **Gourds:** People like to decorate for the fall, and gourds are a natural! There are dozens of different kinds in every size, shape, and color that you can imagine. Encourage the crafter by displaying painted and carved gourds and some turned into birdhouses and bowls. Many seed catalogs sell seed mixes making it easy to grow a good selection. Most gourds are planted from mid-April to mid-May in eastern NC and late May to end of June in western NC.

 **Ornamental Corn, Popcorn, and Dried Field Corn:** Have you seen all the new kinds of dried corn that are available now? They are a "maizing"! They come in a rainbow of colors from earth tones to bright yellows and purples and all sizes and shapes. Whether used for popping, making cornmeal, or just decorating, they are an attractive item to hang in small bunches throughout your stand. Most corn is planted from mid March to the end of April in eastern NC and from mid-April to mid-June in western NC.

 **Winter Squash:** Educate your consumer about the many health benefits, storability, versatility, and great flavor of winter squash such as acorn, buttercup, butternut, kabocha, hubbard, delicata, and spaghetti squash. Most winter squash are planted from mid-April to mid-May in eastern NC and late May to end of June in western NC.

A PUBLICATION OF THE FARM PROSPERITY PROJECT— IMPROVING FARMLAND PROTECTION BY INCREASING FARM PROSPERITY WITH ADOPTION OF HIGH VALUE NEW CROPS AND AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES

DR. JEANINE DAVIS & LAURA DUFFIÉ

DEPARTMENT OF HORTICULTURAL SCIENCE, NC STATE UNIVERSITY

MOUNTAIN HORTICULTURAL CROPS RESEARCH & EXTENSION CENTER, 455 RESEARCH DR. MILLS RIVER, NC 28759

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Cabbage: North Carolina has a reputation for sweet, fall cabbage. Provide customers with large traditional green heads plus a variety of red and mini types. For fall crops, use varieties listed as mid-season, late-season, or storage. Fall cabbage is usually planted from the first of August to mid-September in eastern NC and from late July to mid-August in western NC.



Kale & Collards: These hardy greens will grow well into the fall and get sweeter and better tasting as the cool weather progresses. In eastern NC, these can often be harvested throughout much of the winter. Use succession plantings to have crops available over an extended period, leaving about three months from direct seeding or two months from transplants to harvest. In eastern NC, these crops can be sown from February through June and August through September. In western NC, they are usually sown from the first of April through August.



Spinach: This dark colored green is nutritious and versatile. Sow every week for a continuous supply. Spinach does not germinate well in real hot weather, so wait till August to sow for fall crops.



Greens: There are many specialty greens that are well-suited for the fall market including arugula, many Asian greens, upland cress or creasy greens, mustard and turnip greens, and mesclun mixes. Most of these will not germinate well in the middle of summer, so wait until August to sow in most areas.



Escarole, Endive & Lettuce: These cool season crops are a natural for a fall market but are so rarely available. Surprise your customers by having fresh salad greens in the fall! In eastern NC, these crops are usually planted from the first of August through mid-October. In western NC, they are usually planted from late July through August.



Fennel: Fennel is a versatile herb and vegetable. It can be grown all summer and fall for its feathery foliage and seed, but the consumer has recently discovered how tasty roasted fennel bulbs are. Direct seed fennel through early summer and introduce your customers to this anise flavored bulb that is wonderful roasted, grilled, and in soups.



Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower & Kohlrabi: Everyone knows that Brussels Sprouts are sweetest after a frost! Experiment with some of the new orange, green, and purple cauliflowers. And since many of your customers will be unfamiliar with kohlrabi, be sure to include a recipe or two. These crops are usually planted from the first of August through September in eastern NC and from late July through August in western NC.



Leeks: What's better on a cool autumn evening than a steaming bowl of leek and potato soup and a fresh loaf of crusty French bread? Leeks take a long time to grow. Transplants can be set in early spring for harvest in July and August or set in August for late fall harvests.



Beets, Rutabagas & Turnips: Roasted root vegetables are all the rage. Provide your customers with a good variety of these colorful roots. These crops are usually planted from the first of August through mid-September in eastern NC and from mid-July through mid-August in western NC.



Horseradish: Be the only farmer in your area to offer fresh horseradish to serve with that prime rib or roast beef sandwich. Horseradish is easy to grow if planted in a well-drained deep soil, rich in organic matter. Plant in early spring and harvest after the first frost.



Daikon Radish: There are certain varieties of these large, long, white radishes especially for fall harvest, including "Miyashige" and "Summer Cross No. 3". Daikon is usually planted in late July through August throughout NC.



Irish Potatoes: Early fall is when you harvest potatoes to store through the winter months. Offer your customers a good selection including yellow, red, and purple fleshed varieties; russets, and the traditional red potatoes. Potatoes are planted from mid-February through March in eastern NC and from the first of April through mid-June in western NC.



Sweetpotatoes: North Carolina is a large producer of sweetpotatoes, so offer your customers a good variety of the best our state has to offer. Be sure to include some of the unusual colored varieties and drier fleshed Boniato types. Sweetpotatoes are usually planted from the first of May through mid-July in eastern NC and from late May through the end of June in western NC.



Shallots: These onion-like bulbs are a tasty “gourmet” addition to many dishes. Direct seed or plant sets in early to midspring for a fall harvest.



Garlic: There are so many things you can do with garlic! Make garlic braids and wreaths or just sell a variety of garlics, including red skinned, white skinned, and elephant garlic. Garlic is best planted in the fall for harvest in June. Properly cured, it will be ready for sale in early fall.



Yellow Storage Onions: Your customers enjoyed fresh sweet onions all summer, now offer them dry bulb onions for their fall and winter cooking. Sets and seed are often planted in fall and overwintered or planted in the early spring.



Shiitake & Oyster Mushrooms : These mushrooms grow on logs and fruit most readily in the cooler months. This makes them a natural for the fall market. Logs inoculated with spawn in the late winter to early spring will begin fruiting 6 to 18 months later, depending on variety. Logs may be productive for several years.



Dried Beans & Peas: Offer your customers dried beans and peas for their winter soups and to display in mason jars in their kitchens. They come in a wide variety of colors and there are many interesting heirloom types, too. They are usually sown from late March to mid-June in eastern NC and from mid-April to mid-July in western NC.



Dried Peppers: Grow some chili peppers for drying and then string them up and hang them around the stand or create wreaths of peppers. Peppers are usually transplanted from mid-April to mid-May in eastern NC and from mid-May through mid-July in western NC.



Muscadine Grapes: There are new muscadine grape varieties that have wonderful fresh eating qualities. Large and juicy with thinner skins and smaller seeds, customers are clamoring for them because they taste good and they are good for you. Grape production is a long-term proposition, but worth considering.



Tree Nuts & Peanuts: Nuts belong on the fall market, whether fresh roasted peanuts or shelled pecans or walnuts, give your customers a wide selection. Peanuts require special equipment and handling and only grow well in eastern NC. Tree nuts are a long-term proposition. These might be crops you purchase from fellow farmers if you don't grow them yourself.



Apples & Pears: If you don't have a small orchard yourself, be sure to purchase locally grown tree fruits to round out your fall selection of fruits and vegetables.



Cider: People love fresh cider. Consider purchasing locally produced cider to sell on your stand. There are some food safety concerns with cider, so pasteurized cider is suggested.



Honey: Honey goes so well with winter squash, nuts, and pumpkins. If you don't have your own hives, make arrangements with a local beekeeper to carry honey in squeezable “honey bears”, pint jars, and quarts.



Corn Stalks & Straw Bales: People need props and accessories for their fall decorative displays, so be sure to have bundles of corn stalks and several sizes of straw bales for sale. They are also useful for your own displays!



Fall Mums & Pansies: If you've got the room, consider selling fall bedding plants, pansies, and big pots of colorful fall mums. Their bright colors attract the eye and compliment your other produce.



For More Information consult:

Vegetable Crop Handbook for the Southeastern U.S. This is a complete handbook for vegetable production was created and edited by extension specialists in the Southeast. Available on-line at <http://ncspecialtycrops.org>.

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project: A non-profit organization in Western North Carolina dedicated to marketing local agricultural products. Publishes a local food guide. Good research information. Available on-line at: <http://asapconnections.org>.

Growing for Market. This is a national monthly publication dedicated to direct market farmers. Available on-line at: <http://growingformarket.com>.

Local Harvest. A national buy local organization dedicated to helping farmers market their crops. Lots of resources and selling opportunities. Available on-line at: <http://localharvest.org>.



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