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Kale Seeds & My Fall Garden That Isn't

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I have a mental block on fall gardens. I want one. Every year I visit friends' lovely November patches of kale, collards and lettuce and marvel that I will not make one consistently happen at my home despite my best intentions every year.

Note: The blog entry site at KGI did not give me the option to include photos...to view photos that go with this post see http://ozarksalive.org/larrapin/?p=919 [1]

It has to do with planting in the bloody miserable heat of late summer, early fall in Arkansas. It seems about the time the fall seeds should be going in, I'm sacked out somewhere from heat exhaustion from digging rocks in the two daily hours of a summer day cool enough (7-9 am or so) to prevent just dropping over dead in the field...or it seems that way to me. Strange for a southern girl, but I'm as intolerant of high temps as the cool-weather crops I covet come fall!

Ok, so the above paragraph is both inaccurate and exaggerated, a little. The timing most garden books seem to give for fall planting (August) is just not feasible here. The seeds and seedlings will just cook where you plant them. In my usual state of fall garden regret, I've been asking said gardeners "EXACTLY when DID you plant your kale/collards etc?" And of the ones who can remember, the dates run more toward mid-September. And some of those are plantings really planned for early spring harvest...as the seedlings will overwinter in row-covered beds then take off come the first sunshine of spring.

But heck, I should just consult the wisdom of the plants I want to grow, kale in particular. When would they naturally drop seeds? Take the photo above. Those are the wonderful bb-like seeds I collected off a patch of overwintered ragged-jack kale, which in biennial fashion, bloom and produce seeds like mad come the following spring. (The post about collecting the kale seed is here [2].) The seeds above were collected in mid-July 2010. It was sweltering. Probably due to sweat in my eyes, I must have dropped some, because this is the scene in November beside the spot:

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So the seeds I dropped in July and left completely untended and unwatered (!) grew up at the right time into this lovely kale! While I wouldn't advise the 'unwatered' part if you actually want to have more than one hardy plant..the message to me is the plants really know what they are doing when they drop seed in in sweltering summer heat.

To further my embarrassing lack of fall kale around here, one gardening friend confided she hasn't planted kale in she can't remember when. Seems that years ago she let a patch go to seed, and they've been coming up and re-seeding themselves ever since. She says she often has friends over to dig up the zillion seedlings in spring to transplant to their gardens...guess I should get in line!

But there were a few things I did really right this year. One was get cover crops on many of the new garden beds shown above. The left bed mix was planted in early August after I took out the corn and beans. The bed on the right was planted in mid-October. The one in the middle that was in use till late, I'll cover with chicken-chopped leaves [3] and straw for the winter.

So due to my half-assed* garden planning (*thanks to Susan R. for the term 'half-assed gardening'...though I must point out that she HAS fall greens going...) I won't have those delicious fall greens in my own garden this year. But I have friends who do and I know where they live. Meanwhile, I'll just wander around, begging for greens, and photographing cute scenes like this one in my neighborhood..

Next post is a photo tour of my friend's gardens who have the fall-thing going on! Don't miss it?subscribe by email below!

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