Don't let fall or potentially frosty temperatures stop you from enjoying garden- fresh produce. Extend the nutritional value and homegrown flavor into your fall and early winter meals with the help of short season crops and season extending strategies.

Lettuce, spinach, radishes, turnips, and beets are quick to mature from seed to harvest. Plus, the cooler temperatures enhance their flavor. Simply count the number of frost-free days left in your growing season and compare it with the number of days from planting to harvest listed on the seed packet.

Protect these late plantings and other vegetables from chilly fall temperatures with cloches, coldframes, and floating row covers. Many of these devices have long been used by gardeners to jump start the season in spring and extend it much later into fall. These devices trap heat around the plants, protecting them from frosty temperatures.

Convert gallon milk jugs into garden cloches for individual plants. Remove the bottom of the jug and slide it over the plant. Use the cap to capture heat or remove to ventilate your homemade cloche on sunny days. Or purchase reusable cloches with built in ventilation. Originally made of glass many of the newer cloches are plastic, making them more affordable, easy to stack and portable.

You can make your own coldframes. Many gardeners convert discarded windows, a bit of lumber and nails into a homemade shelter for their plants. The window size usually determines the size of your coldframe. Just make sure you can reach all the plants inside. For best results your frame should be higher in the back then the front so water and melting snow can drain off. And if possible, facing south for better warming. The internet and garden books are filled with

plans.

I prefer the construction-free, all-purpose garden fabrics. Simply drape these floating row covers (season-extending fabrics) over your crops. Anchor the edges with rocks, boards, or wire wickets. The fabric traps heat around your plants, but allows air, light and water through so there is no need to uncover the plants during the day or for watering.

Increase the ease of season-extending fabrics with low and tall frost pop-up covers and plant protection frost covers from Gardener's Supply. The frames are fitted with all-purpose garden fabric to create protective tents. You can protect new plantings and extend your harvest by protecting plants down to 24 degrees Fahrenheit.

So with a little preparation you can keep enjoying fresh-from-the-garden flavor long past the traditional end to your harvest season.
For more gardening tips visit www.melindamyers.com

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including Can't Miss Small Space Gardening. She hosts the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment segments which air on over 115 TV and radio stations throughout the U.S. and Canada. She is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and writes the twice monthly "Gardeners' Questions" newspaper column. Melinda also has a column in Gardening How-to magazine. Melinda hosted "The Plant Doctor" radio program for over 20 years as well as seven seasons of Great Lakes Gardener on PBS. She has written articles for Better Homes and Gardens and Fine Gardening and was a columnist and contributing editor for Backyard Living magazine. Melinda has a master's degree in horticulture, is a certified arborist and was a horticulture instructor with tenure. Her web site is www.melindamyers.com