

Fall Vegetable Garden Course

Course in fall vegetable gardening offers Hobby Farms Editor in Chief inspiring learning activities.

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By Karen Keb Acevedo

This past August I did something I've always wanted to do ... learn to garden! Now, I've always gardened and thought I had things down pretty well, but I had never planted a fall vegetable garden. Trellises are cleaned and stored, and beds are under heavy mulch by October, right? Wrong!

I traveled to the John C. Campbell Folk School in the heart of Appalachia, Brasstown, N.C., to take the course "The Fall Vegetable Garden," taught by local market farmer, Frances Juhlin of Candy Mountain Farm in Murphy.

Founded in 1925 and set on approximately 75 acres, the Folk School offers myriad classes—from basketry and blacksmithing to music and storytelling—taught in a supportive, non-competitive environment.

Folks from all walks of life converge each week here to learn a chosen craft in the school's picturesque, mountain environment.

Instructors Stephen and Frances Juhlin and farmhand Kino. I spent the week rooming with a woman whom I had never met—a psychologist from the Bronx, N.Y., enrolled in Basketry—and we got along famously! We'd stay up late at night talking about the day's events and our lives back home.

Meals were eaten in the dining hall, served family style around tables of eight—hearty comfort foods, as well as a healthy vegetarian buffet.

If you're into learning vacations, rather than lazing ones, you'll certainly find a class to inspire you at the John C. Campbell Folk School (www.folkschool.org).

We also took a field trip to Frances' market farm where two acres are planted in crops; we picked mustard greens, eggplants, and tomatoes, telling stories like old sharecroppers. Frances shared the wealth of knowledge she has acquired as a market farmer for more than 20 years.

In my opinion, you won't find a better vacation anywhere!

Notes from Karen's Course ...

Here's a sampling of what my class learned over five days: To start seeds like broccoli, lettuce greens, Asian greens, fennel and cabbage in propagation trays in August. Fill an old, clean dishsoap bottle with water and gently water all seedlings for the first week. After a few days, douse your seedlings with a fish emulsion fertilizer, like any of these Prepare beds, fertilize soil and direct seed; protect beds and extend the growing season with Reemay fabric, like this. Transplant seedlings into beds and water, water, water!