

When to Start Your Vegetable Seeds

The following charts show when to plant Early Season Vegetables (“cold lovers”) and Warm Season Vegetables (“heat lovers”). Optimum soil temperature for seed germination is given. As a general guideline, plant “cold lovers” when the average soil temperature is 7 C° (approx. late April). To take the soil temperature, insert a soil thermometer 5-8 cm into the soil over several days and calculate the average temperature. “Heat lovers” like to be planted in soil that averages 15 C° (approx. late May). If you plant into raised beds, the temperature will rise much faster and you can plant sooner. However, heat lovers may need a light fabric cover if planted before the end of May, to protect against sudden, late season frosts.

Seeding Indoors: This is a wonderful way to start the season. You will need a fluorescent light (preferred) or some extra space in a very bright window. As a beginner, you may want to start by purchasing strong, healthy looking plants from a nursery or garden centre. See reverse for info on hardening off your plants.

| Early Season Veggies | Seeding Inside | Transplanting Outside | Direct Seeding Outside | Optimum Soil Temp. °C |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Broccoli | 1st week April | 1st week May | season too short | 7-30 |
| Brussels sprouts | 1st week April | 1st week May | season too short | 7-30 |
| Cabbage | 1st week April | 1st week May | season too short | 7-35 |
| Cauliflower | 1st week April | 1st week May | season too short | 7-30 |
| Kale | 1st week April | 1st week May | early April or late fall | 7-24 |
| Kohlrabi | 1st week April | 1st week May | mid-May to mid-July | 5-33 |
| Lettuce | mid-April | mid-May | early May to mid-July, fall | 5-27 |
| Beets | no | no | late April to late May | 10-30 |
| Carrots | no | no | late April to early June | 7-30 |
| Fava beans | no | no | late April to late May | 15-18 |
| Onion sets (bulbs) | no | plant sets early May | - | 10-35 |
| Parsnips | no | no | late April to late May | 10-21 |
| Peas | no | no | as soon as soil is workable | 5-24 |
| Potatoes | no | no | early May | 10-25 |
| Rutabaga, turnips | no | no | late April to late May | 7-30 |
| Radishes | no | no | as soon as soil is workable, to early June | 7-32 |
| Spinach | no | no | as soon as soil is workable, every two weeks until end of May; or seed in fall | 7-24 |
| Swiss chard | no | no | early May | 10-30 |
| Leeks | purchase seedlings | early May | season too short | 10-25 |

| Warm Season Veggies | Seeding Inside | Transplanting Outside | Direct Seeding Outside | Optimum Soil Temp. °C |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Pepper | early March | late May (with protection) to early June | season too short | 15-35 |
| Eggplant | mid-March | late May with protection | season too short | 15-32 |
| Tomatoes | late March, early April | late May with protection | season too short | 15-30 |
| Cucumber | early May | late May with protection | late May | 15-30 |
| Squash, pumpkin, zucchini | late April | late May with protection | season too short for larger varieties | 15-30 |
| Corn | early May | early June | mid-May | 15-35 |
| Beans | 1st week May | 1st week June | late May | 15-30 |

Hardening Off Your Plants

All plants (even the ones purchased from a garden centre), need to be acclimatized to the bright light, wind and temperature fluctuations outside. Plants need to be hardened **for about 8-10 days** before they are planted outside.

- Indoors, creating “wind” using a fan or by fanning with a wad of newspapers (great for kids) is also good, as the movement strengthens the plant stems.
- Place the plants in a sheltered, partially shaded area (for example on the east side of your house) for 2-3 hours the first day, then increase the time a couple of hours each day.
- If you need to place them in a full sun location, they can only be out for 1 hour the first couple of days, then gradually increase the time each day.
- You can also place them in a box covered with row cover, a white fabric available at garden centres. Gradually remove the fabric and extend the amount of time the plants spend in direct light outside.
- Reduce watering somewhat, but don’t let the plants wilt. At this point, do not fertilize them.

Cold Lovers: Take the plants in at night if the temperature is predicted to fall below 4 C°.

Heat Lovers: Take the plants in at night if the temperature is predicted to fall below 10 C°.

After this adjustment period and if there is no risk of frost, transplant the plants in the garden and fertilize them only with half strength solution of organic, liquid fertilizer for the first time. In a couple of weeks you can give them the recommended strength.