

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.