

When to Plant Vegetables and Which Varieties to Plant*
by
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Cool Weather Vegetables

Start Indoors

Start these vegetables indoors under lights or purchase seedlings. Transplant broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale and kohlrabi plants into your garden beds at the end of May to avoid damaging late frosts. Onion sets and leeks can be transplanted early in April. Do not plant broccoli or cauliflower out too soon. If temperatures suddenly dip to 20 F, they could “button up” or form tiny heads. Plants almost never recover from this.

Broccoli

Cabbage

Cauliflower

Kale

Kohlrabi

Onions. It's best to purchase onion sets. Make sure the type you buy are varieties that bulb in summer. Plant mid-March to mid-April.

Leeks. It's best to purchase leek plants. Plant out in March.

Direct Seed

Direct seed these vegetables into the ground, according to seed packet directions as soon as you can work the soil, early or mid-March, but no later than late March. Being able to work the soil means it is not frozen or too moist. Many can also be planted for late fall harvest. Seed them in late July or beginning of August.

Arugula

Beets

Carrots

Fava beans (Plant when you plant your peas.)

Lettuce (Use varieties labeled as heat tolerant.)

Mache

Mesclun mixes

Mustard greens

Pak choi

Peas

Radishes

Rutabagas

Spinach (Use heat tolerant varieties only)

Swiss chard

Turnips

Warm Weather Vegetables

Direct Seed

Direct seed these vegetables into the garden at the end of May or beginning of June. Please note, for an earlier harvest you may start squashes, pumpkins, melons and cucumbers indoors under lights or purchase seedlings. Seedlings should be started about 3-4 weeks before planting out. Do not transplant them into your garden until end of May or beginning June.

Corn

Summer quash

Winter squash

Pumpkins

Cucumbers

Beans

Soybeans

Buy Seedlings or Start Seeds Indoors

These vegetables cannot be grown by direct seeding into the garden. Our season is simply not long enough for them to be productive. Either purchase plants or start your own seedlings according to seed packet directions:

Tomatoes

Tomatillos

Eggplants

Peppers

Melons

Okra

What the seed packet tells you

It goes without saying that you need to read the information on your seed packets and you need to read it early so you have plenty of time to follow instructions for planting 8 or more weeks out. Seed packets will tell you if a plant needs to be started indoors or if it can be direct seeded. Some seeds, such as cucumbers or squashes can be direct seeded or started indoors. If you are direct seeding lettuce or spinach, for example, then it will tell you how far apart and how deep to plant seeds. It may also tell you how long it takes for the seeds to germinate and the number of days to maturity, from direct seeding or transplanting into your garden.

If you need to start plants indoors, seed packets will say when you need to start them, as in “Start indoors 8 weeks before planting out.” If your date to plant your seedlings out in the garden is June 1st, then you know you need to start them by April 1st. You are always counting backwards from the planting out date. The most informative seed packets, hands down are from Botanical Interests, a local seed company.

Hardening Off:

Please note that all seedlings need to be hardened off, which means gradually getting them used to being out of doors in bright light, sun and dryness. You cannot always assume that plants purchased from your garden center are sufficiently hardened off. The whole process takes about a week. Start them out in shade on the north side of your house on a warm day and leave them out a couple of hours and be sure to bring them in at night. Then move them to the east and leave them out in part shade a little longer 3 days in succession, again bringing them in at night. Finally, transfer them to the west or south side of your house and do the same. Keep them properly watered during this hardening off period. Do not leave warm weather vegetables out overnight until nighttime temperatures are approaching 50 F.

Yes, It matters where you buy your seeds!

Many seeds available in garden centers and in catalogs are not suitable for our climate. We need greens that don't bolt and go to seed when the weather heats up in the spring, tomatoes that ripen in a shorter season and set fruit in our summer heat, as well as short season melons that ripen and sweeten up before the weather gets cold. We also need to support our seed saving institutions, such as Seed Saver's Exchange and we need to buy from companies that do not sell GMO seeds and prominently display the "Safe Seed Pledge" in their catalogs and websites. We should also support companies that do not fill their catalogs with mostly hybrids. We want open pollinated seeds to be available in the future! Every seed packet you buy is a vote for that variety's availability in the future!

My Personal Favorites*: Cool Weather Vegetables

Arugula: Wild arugula, sometimes called **arugula selvetica or sylvetta** is fast becoming a perennial here. It is not heat tolerant and does get a lot more peppery in the heat, but we've learned to love that. Careful, it seeds around!

Lettuce: Heat tolerance is necessary, even though lettuce is seeded very early. My favorite varieties are: **Deer Tongue**; **Forellenschuss**, a speckled romaine variety from Austria; **Bronze Arrowhead**, aka **Bronze Beauty**, **Merveille des Quatre Saisons**, **Rouge d' Hiver**, **Red Velvet** and **Lollo Rosso**. Although I mostly direct seed, I have had considerable success with starting some of these lettuces indoors. DM recommends **Winter Density** and **Speckles**.

Spinach: Everyone is now scrambling to find a replacement for the very heat resistant Tyee spinach, which has been discontinued. I am growing **Nobel Giant** and **Corvair**. DM has had good luck with a variety called **Space**

(Burpee). Do not grow **America** and **Bloomsdale Long Standing**. They go to seed almost immediately.

Peas: **Oregon Giant** snow pea. Large, but still tender, with very little stringiness, Oregon Giant is considerably more productive than English peas and produces higher yields than **Sugar Snap** peas.

Radishes: Many bolt in the spring before forming bulbous roots, so perhaps we could try growing them in the fall now.

Kale: A great variety for eating is **Dwarf Blue Curled Scotch**. For ornamental purposes use **Redbor** or one of the flowering kales, though **Redbor** is pretty good eating. Leaves left on too long in the summer tend to get tough. Tastes sweeter after the first frost.

Kohlrabi: Our old favorites Purple Vienna and White Vienna no longer form bulbous stems. Try **Kossak**, measuring 8" in diameter that keeps in cold storage for 4 months, and **Superschmelz**, another large variety (8-10") that stays especially tender and sweet. I am trying **Konan** for the first time this year.

Leeks: Leeks are best ordered as plants. Many seed houses offer this service. The best variety is **Lancelot** (a few plants will still form seed heads or scapes, making the leeks unusable. **King Richard** forms way too many flower scapes)

Broccoli: **Packman** and **Gypsy** are the most heat tolerant and the tastiest varieties. Gypsy has the edge on taste, but it may not be as productive. They provide a continuous supply of side shoots after the main heads are harvested, except for a slowdown in July. Absolutely no planting out until very late May or beginning June!

Beets: Most beets do well here: **Detroit Dark Red**, **Merlin**, **Cylindra**, **Early Wonder**. "**Bull's Blood**" is an heirloom variety with beautiful maroon leaves, however the beets are not as sweet as many others. Most beets don't keep too well. If you're looking for a variety that stores well and tastes good, DM says to try **Lutz**.

Carrots: We have mostly clay soils here, even after amendment, so we try to grow carrots that are not much longer than 6", so they can grow straight down rather than become crooked. Yaya, and Danvers half long have worked for me. Get your seeds from a seedhouse that tells you how long they get! Also it is easier to sow them if they are pelleted. DM has good luck with **Tendersweet**.

Cauliflower: Some varieties occasionally don't form heads in the heat. Make sure you grow a self-blanching type. This means it has large "wrapper leaves" that keep the heads white. The variety '**Cheddar**' generally forms good heads in our climate. 'Romanesco' cauliflower, sometimes referred to as '**Romanesco**' broccoli' has beautiful lime-green "spires." making up its heads. Harvest it young when it tastes better. It's actually better and more beautiful raw than cooked.

Cabbage: DM recommends Excalibur and Glory of Enkhuize, both of which have good sized heads and good flavor; Gonzales for a nice softball size, and Ruby Perfection if you want red cabbage.

Warm Weather Vegetables

Beans: **Blue Lake Bush Beans**, **Haricot Verts Filet Beans** (any of the stringless varieties), **Blauhilde**, a beautiful purple bean with purplish pink flowers (pole bean), DM recommends **Golden Butter Wax** and **Provider** green bush bean, a good producer with a longer season.

Eggplant: Two long varieties stand out: **Waimanalo Long**, a University of Hawaii developed variety and **Pingtung Long**, a variety from Taiwan which both perform beautifully in our dry hot summers. **Black Beauty** is a good choice for eggplant parmesan.

Peppers: My favorites are anchos, either **Baron** or **Ancho Gigantea**. Also, **Yummy Belles** (Renee's) are very tasty orange snack peppers similar to the ones at Costco. If you want to grow a plain green pepper, the Italian variety **Marconi** is excellent and can be harvested green in about 70 days or red in roughly 90. DM grows **Lipstick** which turns red quite quickly, is smaller but a good producer; Big Bertha for stuffing, **Ancho**, **Serrano**, **Tabasco**, **Anaheim** and **Early Jalapeno**.

Tomatoes: My current favorites are: **Black Krim**, **SunSugar**, **Early Girl**, **Cosmonaut Volkov**, **Mandarin Cross**, **GreenZebra**, **Celebrity**, **Early Blue Ribbon** and **Taxi**.

Paste Tomatoes: **Roma (Burpee)**, **Martinis Roma**, **Super Italian**.

Dwarf Tomatoes: The Dwarf Tomato Project has produced a substantial number of hybrid tomatoes that are stable crosses of heirloom tomatoes and dwarf tomatoes making them smaller and easier to grow. The heirloom parent provides the flavor and the dwarf tomatoes produce the growth habit. We will grow some for the sale this spring.

Tomatoes for Hot, Dry Climates (preliminary list):

Our summer temperatures have been much higher lately and along with that we have had problems getting our tomatoes to set fruit. People are now trying to find varieties that do well in hot, dry, desert-like climates (or hot moist climates). Our problem is that we have a hot, dry climate but a short growing season. We got a list of suitable varieties off the web and want to try some of the earlier ones to see if they perform as promised:

Beefmaster, 80 days (indet)

Celebrity, 70 days (det)

Early Girl 50-52 days (indet)

Sweet 100, 65 days (indet)

Arkansas Traveller, 90 days (indet)

Brandywine OTV 70 days (indet)

Burbank Slicing Tomato, 70 days (det)

Costoluto Genovese, 85 days (indet)

Eva Purple Ball, 70 days (indet)

Great White Beefsteak, 85 days (indet)
Marvel Striped Tomato 95 days (indet)
Purple Calabash, 90 days (indet)
Thessaloniki, 80 days (indet)
Yellow Pear, 70-80 days (indet)
Homestead 24, 80 days (det)
Prize of the trials, 80 days (indet)
Roma VF, 75 days (det)
Source: tomatodirt.com

Cucumbers: Tasty Jade from Johnny's is the best cucumber I ever grew, but seed availability will be an issue soon. **Persian cucumbers** (the small, slender cocktail cucumbers at Costco and specialty markets) are delicious if you harvest them while they are still small. Betty Harris favors **Armenian** cucumbers, which are really a cucumber-like melon. DM grows **Marketmore 76** for eating and pickling and **Delikatesse** for eating.

Squashes, Summer: I have been growing **Patio Star Hybrid Zucchini** (for growing in pots) in my raised beds. The flavor is good, but even better, the plants stay small and don't grow out of the raised beds. You may have difficulty in finding this in the future, so try another zucchini for growing in pots, such as **Astia**..

Squashes, Winter: **Kuri**, aka **Hokkaido** squash makes great risotto and wonderful soup; **Kabocha** squash, aka Japanese Pumpkin (varieties **ChaCha** or **Hikkori**). Kabocha squash grows so well in our Colorado climate, much of what we grow is exported to the real connoisseurs in Japan. DM grows **Carnival** acorn, **Buttercup**, **Waltham Butternut**, and **Hopi Gray**, a native American squash considered quite flavorful.

Melons: Minnesota Midget. This mighty midget, though no larger than 3-4" in diameter, packs loads of sweetness and flavor. As always with melons, plant them in your warmest and sunniest spot. Trellising helps maximize space.

Soybeans (edamame) I don't have space for soybeans anymore. DM grows **Midori** and **Midori Giant**.

Corn. Corn is wind pollinated. It was exactly the wrong plant to turn into a ubiquitously planted GMO because the wind spreads the pollen over long distances. Yes, this corn is chiefly used for livestock and processed foods, however, we can only assume that much of the fresh corn that humans eat has been contaminated by GMO corn. It's best to buy organic seeds and choose an early variety. Most people prefer the supersweet types. The minimum amount to grow is a plot of 4 rows, 4 ft long, so there is adequate pollination. Warning: It's a real water hog!!

Tomato Pollination and Summer Temperatures

"Tomato pollination is temperature dependant. If nighttime temperatures drop below 55F, pollen fails to develop and flowers that open the following morning will not set fruit.

Cool nights often interfere with fruit set for early tomatoes and in higher elevations. Blossom set sprays helps set fruit even with cool nights.

If the daytime temperature reaches 90F by 10 a.m., blossoms that opened that morning abort. Blossom set sprays are not effective under high temperatures.

In July and August along the Colorado Front Range, night temperatures have a 50/50 probability of staying above 55F any given night. In unusually warm seasons, tomato fruit set may be unusually high. When poor soil conditions and/or watering problems limit plant growth potential, fruit may ripen while small. With good soil tilth and water conditions, fruit size may be unusually large." **Colorado State University Extension Service. CMG Garden Notes #717 "Growing Tomatoes".**

Tomato Growth Habits and Days to Maturity

Indeterminate: Sometimes called vining or climbing tomatoes, these plants continue to grow tall as they bear fruit. These tomatoes need staking and caging and may also benefit from a little pruning. Most tomato plants are indeterminate.

Determinate: These tomatoes stop growing taller as soon as they start bearing fruit. Fruits ripen in a more concentrated period. They do not need caging or pruning but usually benefit from staking. **The following tomato varieties we are determinate: Defiant PhR, Green Zebra, Matino's Roma, Patio Princess Hybrid, Red Robin, Roma (Burpee), Silvery Fir Tree and Taxi.**

Dwarf: Dwarf tomatoes are genetic anomalies. The first dwarf tomato was a French variety called "Tomate de Laye." Very little further development occurred on them because they did not provide good yields and the fruits were small. The plants are stocky with rugose (wrinkled or ridged) leaves. The Dwarf Tomato Project is a long term collaborative effort led in Australia by Patrice Nuske Small and in the United States by Craig LeHouiller to develop tasty new varieties by crossing good tasting heirlooms with dwarf tomatoes. Some of the finished tomatoes from this project are now available from victoryseeds.com.

Days to Maturity

Early varieties mature in roughly **49-65 days** from planting out.

Midseason varieties mature in roughly **66-79 days** from planting out.

Late season varieties mature in about **80 days or more** from planting out.

* With additions from Deborah Moody, the Arapahoe County Master Gardener who manages the Vegetable Demonstration Garden at Hudson Gardens. Most of her additions have the designation DM. I would personally like to thank Deborah for sharing her extensive knowledge of vegetables with us.

Paula Szilard 1/20/19

