

Early Vegetable Sowing Guide



When to start planting

There are two ways you can determine the right planting time for your area: by soil temperature or by the last frost date.

- Monitor the soil warmth with a soil thermometer, and plant when the temperature is consistently at least 55 F but less than 70 F.

-Alternatively, find out the last average date of the last spring frost in your area, then count back 2 to 8 weeks, depending on the kind of crop you have.

Helpful tips to get started

- Most early crops, including root vegetables and leafy greens grow best from direct seeding.
- Make sure you harden off any transplants grown indoors by exposing them to the elements slowly. Start by putting them outside for just a few hours and then increase their amount of time outside for a week until they are ready to plant.
- Plants such as broccoli, cabbage, kale, and Brussels sprouts can often be grown indoors and transplanted as seedlings during cool-weather sowing.
- Always review the seed packet to determine optimal planting dates.



What is an average last frost date?

A frost date is the average date of the first freeze that occurs in spring. Local weather and topography may change these dates significantly, but within the western Chicagoland region, (considered zone 5B), the average frost date is May 15th. Frost dates are calculated by data from NOAA.

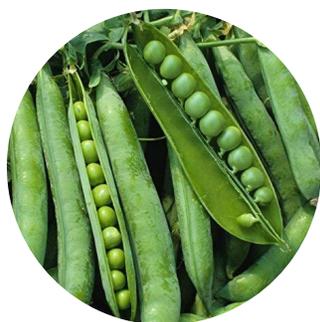
Early Vegetables to Start this spring



Cold hardy crops

The hardiest cool weather crops can be planted as soon as the soil is thawed and dry enough to work in Spring, generally at a soil temperature of 35-40 F: F

Fava Beans, lettuce, radishes, spinach, and turnips.



Moderate cold hardy crops

Moderate cool-weather crops do better when planted 2 - 8 weeks before last average frost date (Mid-March to Early May):

Beets, Bok Choy, Broccoli, Brussel sprouts, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Carrots, Onions, Peas, Sugar Snap Peas, Potatoes

Get an early start, but not too early

Cool crops need colder climates to thrive and germinate, but the temperature is a tricky balance between 40-55 degrees (for most col hardy seeds). But lack of germination can be a result of a poor early harvest. In addition, there's always the danger of a late frost in this climate, so plan ahead. Make sure you have a bed sheet or clear tarp for cold nights to protect new seedlings.

Succession Planting

When working with limited space, plan your garden design to incorporate your early spring crops. It is feasible to have a successful harvest from your early cool-season vegetables prior to the start of your warm season garden. Be sure to read seed packets thoroughly to determine seed to harvest dates, and plan accordingly. Here's to a healthy and productive harvest