



GARDEN planting guide

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"Anyone who thinks gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year; for gardening begins in January with the dream." — Josephine Neuse

For the farmer and homesteader, the most exciting time of the entire year is spring. Glorious, exciting, utterly insane spring. There are chicks to buy, seeds to start, gardens to plan, and new babies to enjoy, just a name a few.

It's exhilarating, and fulfilling, and sometimes a wee bit overwhelming. (*Ok, who am I kidding— it's usually a LOT overwhelming!*)

While I have yet to figure out the formula for a perfectly stress-free spring (I have a hunch it probably doesn't exist...), I've found that a big chunk of my stress can be eliminated by **having a plan**. And part of that plan includes knowing when, where, and how I'll start each variety of vegetable in our garden. This eliminates the all-too-familiar garden-induced panic that sets in when the weather finally warms.

First off, you'll want to determine your last spring frost date. I like to use a map like this one:
<https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/news/when-expect-your-last-spring-freeze>. It's more reliable than zone charts, which is important since nothing is more heartbreaking than spending months nurturing seedlings, only to have them freeze to death because you put them outside too early.

Next, use the seed starting information in this guide to map out when you'll plant each of your seeds and whether it'll be started indoors or out. Here's to an amazing year in the garden, my

friends!

— Jill



Consider using a **homemade potting soil recipe** (<http://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2015/04/homemade-potting-soil-recipe.html>), **homemade soil blocks** (<http://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2014/04/diy-soil-block-maker.html>), or **peat or coconut coir pellets**.

You can buy seed starting kits or peat pellets or try making one of these DIY seed starting pots (<http://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2013/02/8-ideas-for-repurposed-seed-starting-pots.html>)



Fluorescent lights on a timer are always a good way to give your seeds a the best start possible if you are limited on window light. If you have a cold room, you might find **heating trays** to be helpful in jump starting germination, too. Check out how we set up our **seed starting system** here: (<http://www.theprairiehomestead.com/2016/03/seed-starting-system.html>)



- + **For low nitrogen:** add fish emulsion, blood meal, or legume cover crops
- + **For low phosphorus:** add rock phosphate for long term results and bone meal for a quick fix
- + **For low potassium:** add wood ash and compost rich in banana peels.
- + **For low calcium:** add lime (*either calcium carbonate lime or dolomitic lime*), gypsum, or clam/oyster shells
- + **For low magnesium:** add epsom salts or dolomitic lime

B.

Compost

Turn your kitchen and yard waste (*leaves, grass clippings, etc.*) into a fantastic soil amendment with very little effort. Compost adds both nutrients and organic matter to soil, and it also helps with water retention. You can buy it at the garden store, however, it's free to make your own.



Manure

Fresh manure can be too hot for plants and may burn them, so it's best to use composted or aged manure. If you are using fresh manure, just be sure to add it in the fall and let it sit all winter. (*Don't apply most fresh manures to growing plants*).

- + **Chicken Manure:** Highest in nitrogen, but also one of the "hotter" options. Definitely let it compost and age well before applying.
- + **Horse Manure:** Easy to find, but may contain the most weed seeds (*although if the compost pile reaches a high enough temperature, this can reduce the weed seeds*). We use a lot of composted horse manure in our garden, since we have two horses, and they poop. A LOT.
- + **Cow Manure:** A great all-purpose manure that doesn't burn plants as easily, due to a lower nitrogen content. Generally less weed seeds than horse manure.
- + **Goat/Sheep Manure:** A drier manure that is less smelly and gentle to plants (*won't burn as easily*). The little pellets make it easy to apply, too.
- + **Rabbit Manure:** This is considered a "cold" manure, so you can add it directly to plants, with no worry of it burning plants. Just grab some

of the “pellets” and sprinkle away! They will disintegrate slowly over time and release their nutrients into the soil as they break down.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are using horse, cattle, goat, or sheep manure, be sure to ONLY use manure from animals who have NOT been grazing or eating hay from fields sprayed with herbicides. There are several types of herbicides that can survive an animals’ gastrointestinal tract and come through the manure to wreak havoc on your gardens. Also— sometimes manure from cattle raised in feedlots has a high salt content which can be damaging to plants, so proceed with caution.

Along with knowing your last frost date and garden zone, it’s a good idea to know your soil temperature when direct sowing your seeds. (Ideal temperatures vary according to the variety of plant, but 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit is a safe bet for the most sensitive veggies. Together, all three pieces of information will give you a solid idea for the best time to direct sow for optimal viability and success.



Beans

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: Anytime after your last frost date, when the soil is at LEAST 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

PLANTING NOTES: Beans do NOT transplant well. These need to be direct sown in the garden. Consider soaking the bean seeds in warm water for a few hours before planting.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [How to Save Bean Seeds](#)

Beets

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best

TIME FRAME: Two weeks before your last frost date

PLANTING NOTES: One beet “seed” is actually multiple seeds, so you will need to thin the plants as they mature. Thankfully, beet root and beet greens are both delicious and can be used in many ways.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [How to Can Pickled Beets](#)



Broccoli

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors.



TIME FRAME: 6-8 weeks before your last frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: Set broccoli seedlings outside when the plants are 5-6 inches tall/approximately 2-3 weeks before the last frost date. If you live in a cooler garden zone, you can direct sow your broccoli seeds in the garden one month before your last frost date.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [How to Plant Broccoli in Your Fall Garden](#)

Brussels Sprouts

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors.

TIME FRAME: 6-8 weeks before last spring frost date. You can also direct sow your seeds 4 months before your first fall frost date.

OTHER PLANTING NOTES: Plant brussels sprouts in the garden after the danger of spring frosts has passed and your seedlings have their first true leaves.

Cabbage

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors.

TIME FRAME: 6-8 weeks before the last spring frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: Transplant cabbage seedlings when they are 3-4 inches tall, which should be about 2 to 3 weeks before the last spring frost date. You can also sow seeds outdoors in the spring when the soil is thawed enough to plant.

OTHER HANDY INFO: *[How to Make Your Own Sauerkraut](#)*

Carrots

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: Begin sowing carrot seeds in the garden 3-4 weeks before the last spring frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: Carrots take a long time to germinate, so be sure to diligently water the soil where you planted them to ensure it stays moist. In Zone 8 and warmer, you should plant carrots in the fall or winter.



Cauliflower

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors.

TIME FRAME: In general, start 4-6 weeks before you are planning on putting them outside. (*Cauliflower can be tricky. They should be started early enough that they can mature before the heat of summer, but not so early that they freeze with hard frosts.*)

PLANTING NOTES: When the seedlings are about 5-6 inches tall, they can be planted outside —this should be about 3-4 weeks before the last expected spring frost date. If spring Cauliflower doesn't work, consider planting it in the fall.

Corn

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: Plant corn seeds directly in the soil two weeks after the last spring frost date, when your soil temperature is at least 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

PLANTING NOTES: Corn is a heavy feeder and needs rich soil, so be sure to amend with plenty of compost.



Cucumbers

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sow OR start inside.

TIME FRAME: You can start cucumbers indoors two-three weeks before planting, but don't do this unless you can keep your seeds at 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit by day and no colder than 60 degrees at night in your home. You can also direct sow them into the garden 2-3 weeks after the last frost date. Since they are so frost-tender, you might want to consider planting a few seeds per week in case you get a freak frost after the last spring frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: These tender plants shouldn't get set into the garden until soil temperatures are around 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit, which is usually at least 2 weeks after the last frost date in the spring.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [How to Make Old-Fashioned Fermented Pickles](#)

Lettuce / Greens



PLANTING METHOD: Direct sow OR start inside.

TIME FRAME: I usually direct-sow my lettuce seeds directly into the soil (*wait until soil temps are at least 45 degrees Fahrenheit*), but you can also start lettuce indoors if you want a jump start on your harvest,

especially since many lettuce varieties cannot handle warm temperatures. To start indoors, sow as early as 10 weeks before the last frost date in spring, and keep them cool (*below 70 degrees*). Transplant the seedlings when the soil can be worked in the spring.

PLANTING NOTES: Lettuce bolts in warm weather, so consider either sowing seeds or transplanting your plants into the garden a little bit each week (*i.e.: succession planting*). The warmer it gets, the more shade you should give your lettuce/greens.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [9 Greens You Can Grow During the Winter](#),
[Spinach Quesadilla Recipe](#)

Peas

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: Direct sow your peas outside 4-5 weeks before your last frost date, when your soil temperature is at least 45 degrees.

PLANTING NOTES: You can start peas indoors even earlier if you want, however, they don't do very well with being transplanted, so be very careful with the young roots when moving them. Consider succession planting and sow some peas each week to try and have the biggest harvest possible.

Peppers

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors first.

TIME FRAME: Start the seeds indoors at least 8-10 weeks before the last frost date.



PLANTING NOTES: Keep your indoor pepper seedlings warm, keep the room around at least 70-75 degrees Fahrenheit. Do not plant them outside until your garden is averaging 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night.

OTHER HANDY INFO: [Homemade Pico de Gallo Salsa](#), [How to Make Hot Pepper Jelly](#)

Potatoes

PLANTING METHOD:
Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: You can start planting seed potatoes (*parts of whole potatoes with at least 2 eyes per piece*) directly in your garden anytime after the soil can be worked in the spring. Hard frosts might damage some of your potato plants, so if you are concerned, plant them only 1-2 weeks before your last frost date.



PLANTING NOTES: Potatoes are cool-season plants and they can survive a few light frosts.

Pumpkins

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sow OR start inside.

TIME FRAME: You can start pumpkins indoors, about 2-4 weeks before your last frost date. Plant your transplants outdoors after all frost danger has passed and when your soil temperature is at least 65 degrees. Pumpkin seeds can also be directly sown in your garden, however, they

have a poor germination rate if the soil is less than 70 degrees. The warmer the soil, the better!

PLANTING NOTES: Pumpkins enjoy rich soil amended with lots of compost.

OTHER HANDY INFO: *The Best Pumpkin Pie Ever, How to Roast Pumpkin Seeds*

Radishes



PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: Radishes are a cool weather crop that is best grown by direct sowing. You can start trying to grow radishes as soon as the soil is workable in the spring, usually about 2-4 weeks before your last frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: Depending on your variety, some radishes are ready to harvest in as little as 22 days. Since they become bitter and often bolt in warm/hot weather (*anything over 65 degrees*), you should consider experimenting with radish seeds and use succession planting. Direct sow some radishes seeds as early as you can in the spring, and then continue up to the last frost date for optimal harvests.

Squash

PLANTING METHOD: Direct sowing is best.

TIME FRAME: You can also direct sow your seeds outdoors when the soil temperature is around 60 degrees. This is usually 1-2 weeks after your

last spring frost date. You can start squashes indoors, just be careful with their roots when planting in your garden because they are somewhat sensitive to transplanting. Start your squashes indoors 3-4 weeks before your last frost date. Do not transplant outdoors until all danger of frost has passed.

PLANTING NOTES: Consider direct sowing some more of your squash seeds in early/mid-summer in case your first crop has issues with spring pests.

Tomatoes

PLANTING METHOD: Best if started indoors unless you live in a very warm climate.

TIME FRAME: Start your seeds indoors 6-8 weeks before your last spring frost date.

PLANTING NOTES: Do not transplant outdoors until all danger of frost has passed and your soil temperature is at least 60 degrees. Tomatoes are one of the most sensitive plants to transplanting. You can minimize transplant shock on your tomatoes by hardening them off for 1-2 weeks before planting them. Planting them deep in the soil helps dampens transplant shock as well.



OTHER HANDY INFO: [How to Freeze Tomatoes, 40+ Ways to Preserve Tomatoes](#)

I'm Jill Winger— a former Idaho girl who came to Wyoming to ride horses, and hasn't looked back since. I didn't grow up on a ranch, or farm, or even on acreage, but I've always had a deep-rooted obsession for the rural way of life. My handy hubby, Christian, and I purchased our 67-acre homestead in 2008, which we currently share with horses, dogs, beef cattle, dairy cattle, goats, chickens, ducks, and three wild prairie children.

Not too long after starting my own homesteading journey, I discovered I wasn't the only one dreaming about compost piles and homemade bread.

I started The Prairie Homestead with the goal of offering community, solidarity, and inspiration for other folks who are on this same path of returning to our roots in this fast-paced modern world. I just might be the [most imperfect homesteader](#) you'll ever find and I most certainly don't claim to have this whole thing figured out. But, I promise to share this crazy journey of mine as it happens-- both the good and the bad.





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