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# GROWING YOUR GARDEN

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As soon as the snow begins to melt, the urge to get the garden growing hits. Some retailers start offering seed packets for sale in February. Try to ensure that these seeds are not just left-over, unsold stock from last year. Seeds lose their viability over time. How they have been stored is important. They should be stored cool, dry, and dark. Age affects some seed varieties more than others, but to ensure the best success, always use “new” seed (seed that has been collected the previous year). Be aware from the start that the germination percentage of that old pack of seed will be lower.

Starting seeds too early on the windowsill is a mistake many make. If you do not have the proper spot to grow the plant after germination, you will only end up with a tall, spindly, weak version of the plant you are attempting to grow.

Grow your young plant under a “grow-light”. It is a specialized bulb, simulating sunlight. Young plants grow well under these lights. If you have a greenhouse, and it is warm enough, (especially at night) move the plants to the greenhouse. If the night-time temperatures, especially, are too cold, you may need to heat the greenhouse.

If you are only growing a few plants, one of those small, five-foot tall, plastic covered ‘greenhouses’ would work great. Place it in a sunny, protected spot outside, put your plants out in the daytime, and bring them in, in the evening, when temperatures drop.

Some vegetable plants are more susceptible to cold than others. Most, however, do better when the night-time temperature *is* lower than in the daytime. (within reason of course). (Celery and peppers, for example, should *never, ever*, experience temperatures below 13 degrees C.)

Always be sure to water your young plants with warm (room temp) water. Never use cold water. A sprayer or mister can be very useful for keeping very young, delicate plants watered. Attempt to water the roots (the soil) and not the whole plant. You do not want the weight of the water droplets to plaster the plant to the ground. Another method is to place the small starter pots in a leak-proof tray and water the tray, allowing the water to be soaked up by the soil. This works especially well with peat pots or jiffy pellets. Caution must be taken to not leave standing water in the tray. The soil should be moist, but not soggy. Soggy soil and warm conditions only encourages disease, mold and fungus, which will kill your young plants quickly.

The first leaves to emerge when the seed germinates are not true leaves, they are called cotyledons, and do not resemble, in shape or size, the plants’ true leaves. The cotyledons will eventually just die off.

Once your plant has several true leaves, and is in a tiny ‘starter’ pot, it will need to be transplanted. If it is still too early in the year to transplant into the garden, or its’ outdoor patio planter, then plant it in a larger pot. You can fertilize at this point as well. Use a good general vegetable fertilizer, but be sure to read the instructions and do not overdose or “burn” your plants. A root stimulating, 5-15-5 fertilizer can be used to encourage strong root growth on your young plant. More about fertilizers in the next column. **Always** handle plants carefully, taking special care to never pinch the stem.

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Ensuring that your plants are well fed is very important. If you expect a bountiful, nutritious harvest of vegetables, or to enjoy florals that are large, plentiful, and brilliant, the plant producing them must receive sufficient nutrients.

Keep in mind that different varieties of plants benefit from different nutrients. While you should avoid high nitrogen fertilizers for carrots; your lettuce, kale and corn (initially-when it is young) are nitrogen hungry, and will benefit from a higher nitrogen fertilizer.

Using a commercial fertilizer is one way to provide your plants with these nutrients. Typically, there are three numbers indicated on the fertilizer packaging. These indicate the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (potash); in that order. Nitrogen is required by the plant for leaf growth. Phosphorus promotes root development and fruit production. Potassium (potash) promotes plant strength and flower colour and size. Plants of course, require many more nutrients (in much smaller amounts) for healthy growth. Many fertilizer mixtures do include some of these trace elements as well.

Unless you are growing a large garden of only one type of crop, many vegetable gardeners use a general purpose 18-18-18 or 8-12-12 on their whole garden. Sometimes side-dressing lettuce, kale, brussels sprouts, etc with a high nitrogen product. Care must be taken when using any fertilizer (especially granular). ALWAYS follow directions! More is NOT better! You can easily burn your plants. NEVER mix a fertilizer that is not labelled as "water soluble" into your watering can water! Water soluble fertilizers are generally in powder form, and are meant to be mixed into the water you are watering your plants with (watering can, attachment on your hose). Unlike the granular fertilizers, that are meant to be *in the soil* only, getting the dissolved, water soluble fertilizer on the plant foliage will *not* damage the plant. Using this type of fertilizer for your baskets and planters is an easy way to fertilize without the worry of "over-doing" it. Remember that all plants in containers need to be fertilized regularly. They cannot grow their roots out any farther into the ground in search of more nutrients.

Many gardeners prefer to avoid commercial fertilizers, and utilize more organic means to fertilize their soil. The first thing that comes to mind is manure. Excellent choice...just be sure it is old, well rotted manure. Fresh manure will burn your plants. Compost is excellent. Worm castings are another great choice, as are fertilizers derived from sea-weed or kelp or fish emulsions.

Organic gardeners can also use bone meal and blood meal. Bone meal, as the name implies, comes from ground animal bones, primarily beef. It is very high in phosphorus (and calcium). If your soil PH is high (above 7), you may want to lower your PH before using bone meal. Blood meal, likewise, comes from slaughterhouses that make dried blood as a by-product of animal (typically cattle) processing. Blood meal is very high in nitrogen, and contains many other beneficial elements, especially iron. Care must be taken when using blood meal to avoid doing more harm than good. This is especially true if your soil is moist and quite warm. These conditions favor the growth of soil bacteria which break the blood proteins down to ammonia. If the bone meal decomposes too quickly, the ammonia can damage roots, especially in young plants or transplants.

Spanish River Carbonatite is derived from a magmatic deposit. It is very rich in calcium, as well as containing potassium and phosphorus, plus a wide array of trace elements. They all work to bolster the nutrient level of your soil.

Consider using Epsom Salts in your garden. Epsom Salt is not "salt". Use 'pure' or 'plain' Epsom Salt (magnesium sulfate). (NOT the fragranced versions available for your bath). This can be added to the bottom of the hole (along with fertilizer) when transplanting. It can be worked into the whole garden, or even dissolved (up to 2 tbsp./gallon) in your watering can. Magnesium is a trace element necessary for plant health. It plays a role in photosynthesis by assisting with the creation of chlorophyll (used by plants to convert sunlight into food). It also facilitates the plants' ability to absorb phosphorus and nitrogen.

Your soil PH level is important. Optimum range for the majority of vegetables is between '5.5' or '6' and '7' (slightly acidic). Neutral is '7'. Most decent garden soils (sandy loams) fall in this range. Soils with a PH greater than '7' are considered alkaline, under '7' and they are considered to be acidic

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Many retail outlets already have their seed displays up in February. Many florals actually do need to be started this early, even earlier. Vegetables, generally, do not.

Firstly, try to determine if in fact the seed packets in the display are indeed new seeds, and not left over from last year. Seeds lose viability as they age. The conditions under which they were stored and the actual seed variety are important factors contributing to viability. Some seed companies will actually print the germination percentage on the seed packets for that year (under ideal conditions of course). You can expect that with age, this percentage will decline. Seeds should be stored cool, dark and dry. In a cold-room or root cellar would work well. Barring these, your fridge is great too. Just keep in mind that many newer fridges have 'frost-free' features, that would dry out your seeds too much. Placing them in a clean sealable glass jar prevents this.

When deciding what vegetable varieties you are going to grow, take note of the 'days to maturity' noted for each variety. While this is usually the number of days from germination to maturity, sometimes it refers to the number of days to maturity from transplanting. In this case, take note of the leaf-stage that transplanting is recommended.

When planting a small quantity of large seeds, (such as beans, peas, corn) germination can be sped up by soaking the seeds overnight in lukewarm water prior to planting.

Purchasing some of the vegetables you wish to grow as plants, rather than seeds, can really jump start your garden (for some varieties this is a necessity with our short growing season). Starting your own seeds indoors is also an option. Proper lighting is crucial once germination has occurred (greenhouse, solarium, sunroom, grow-lights) or tall, weak, unhealthy plants will result.

Be sure to choose to grow vegetables that fit the amount of space that you have. Production per plant will suffer if they are crowded. If you have a small garden plot, and plant a couple of pumpkin or certain varieties of squash plants, they will take over the entire plot, choking out other plants. Cucumbers can be grown up a trellis, or plastic/wire mesh, thus requiring very little "garden space". Choosing to grow pole beans rather than the 'bush' variety can also be a space saver.

It is easy to be fooled by the small size of the seed or young plant, and plant them too close together. Read the spacing instructions on the seed packet, and try to envision the mature plant when placing your seeds or transplants. Thinning may be necessary once the seeds have germinated. Large plants will do well in their own garden spot, large container, or even old tire.

Orientation of your garden should be taken into account when deciding what to plant where. The tallest plants should be at the north end of the garden plot, or up against the wall or fence, if that is where your garden is located.

Be sure to leave sufficient room between the rows for yourself to walk, tend the garden and harvest your crop, without 'walking on' the roots of the plants. Constantly compacting the soil around the root of the plant will result in a stunted plant, and in the case of root crops, deformities.

Remember too, that some crops mature quickly. Radish comes to mind. If you devote a row to radish, that row would be empty in about 20-30 days once the radish is harvested. At this point other plants can be transplanted into this space, or, mix the radish seed with other seed (carrot, beet, dill). Then when the radish is harvested, the other plants continue growing and utilizing that space.

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Keeping your plants watered is one of the most important things you will need to do. Your plants should never dry out to the point of wilting. This is more of a daily issue when container gardening as opposed to in-ground gardening. Closer attention to regular fertilizing is also required when container gardening. Remember that the plant cannot grow its' roots any deeper or farther out in search of moisture or nutrients.

Rain is nature's watering can. Setting up a rain barrel at the end of your eaves trough is an easy way of collecting this water. When setting up your barrel, consider a solid, permanent (or heavy, removable) lid, and install a spigot near the bottom. Not only will this prevent evaporation during dry periods, keep foreign matter out of your water, and deny mosquitoes access to standing water to lay their eggs, but it is also a safety issue when considering young children or pets.

Ground water is an excellent choice to water plants with. If you are lucky enough to have access to water from a tiled well, lake, pond, stream etc., your plants will love it, since this water naturally contains many of the micro-nutrients your plants utilize.

If you have a water softener or conditioner, *never* use this treated water on your plants. Be sure that your hose is plumbed in prior to the softener.

Using your hose and nozzle or sprinkler is the most common and accepted way to water the garden. Just keep in mind that City water is treated and chlorinated, although levels are generally not high enough to harm your plants. Typically, water from your hose is cold. During the summer, 'cold' tap water isn't as cold as in the winter, and mature plants usually have no problems with it. In the Spring however, when the water is still cold, and your plants are young and more vulnerable, you may want to 'warm' the water by filling watering cans (or other reservoir) and allowing it to sit in the sun to warm the water before use.

Container gardening has been popular in Europe for a long time, and is becoming more popular here. It allows even people living in apartment buildings to grow their own produce on the balcony or roof-top. The drawback is that the soil in containers dries out quickly, especially in hot, windy conditions. There are a few things you can do to help your soil retain moisture. When filling your container with soil, be sure to mix in some peat moss, as well as perlite or vermiculite. There are other products on the market as well, that act in the same way when mixed with your soil; retaining, then later, releasing, moisture. Peat moss also adds organic matter to the soil. Commercial 'potting soil' will contain one or more of these. Some gardeners have had success by putting a section of disposable baby diaper in the bottom of their pots. The same principle works here. The diaper lining being designed to retain moisture, which can then be accessible to the plants' roots.

Adding a layer of mulch to the top of the soil around the plant can really slow down evaporation. A layer of shredded bark, leaves, straw, lawn clippings (if your lawn is weed and pesticide free), even rinsed, crushed egg shells will help, and will add organic matter to the soil as the mulch breaks down. Try a layer of stones! Perhaps placed over some geo fabric. It could be aesthetically pleasing in a large planter, all the while slowing evaporation.

Glass or plastic globe waterers (that are filled with water, then inverted into the soil next to the plant) work well, however, are generally too small for efficient outdoor use. Tips or caps are available that use 2-liter plastic pop bottles as a water reservoir. While not as aesthetically pleasing, they are much more efficient in outdoor planters.

Keep in mind that too much water is as harmful to the plant as not enough. Unless you are growing cattails or water-lilies etc, your plants' roots need to "breathe". Plants can drown. Cucumbers are one variety that are very poor 'swimmers', as are beans. If you are over-watering your plant, it may initially present as being 'wilted', and you may even be tempted to water even more. **Always** check the soil! Stick your finger in the dirt...is it dry or wet? You would ideally like the soil to be moist, but not soggy.

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Frost can wipe out your garden very quickly. While some vegetables can survive a light frost, others will not. Root vegetables, cabbage, lettuce, kale, radish, perennial herbs, even broccoli and peas can withstand a light frost, usually only suffering a short 'set-back', and continue growing. Others, (cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, beans, corn, for example) are not so hardy, and must always be protected in the Spring and Fall if a frost threatens.

If you are container-gardening, simply placing the planters under the deck, under your patio table or chairs, or into the garage or shed will protect your plants. Even stashing them up against a building, under a large, low eaves could be sufficient.

The heat released in cities by pavement, cement, buildings, and that generated by people and vehicles etc., will generally keep the temperature "in town" a degree or two higher than in outlying areas. It is that degree or two that could mean frost in outlying areas and not in the city proper. As well, if your garden is near a body of water, the moderating effect of the water may be enough to save your garden from a light frost.

In the Spring...try to postpone the planting of the seeds of frost-prone vegetables so they will not emerge above ground until after the last frost. This may be easier said than done, since in outlying areas, a frost as late as the third week of June is not unheard of.

Lower laying areas (bottom of a hill) are more susceptible to frost than a higher area next to it. It is difficult for frost to settle if the air at ground level is moving. If your garden is small enough, setting up a fan could be an answer. Two fans, one at each end of the garden, (facing each other) could cause sufficient air turbidity to prevent frost from settling.

Larger operations (orchards, vineyards) will light fires in barrels to raise the air temperature at crop level that degree or two that could save the crop from frost. In the city, this really is not a viable option. Keeping your sprinkler on during those "frost prone" hours can mitigate the effects of a light frost as well. This would not be recommended if your garden soil is already soggy.

There are many products available to protect your plants. "Hot-caps" or other individual plant covers work well. You can even fill some with water, providing extra insulation. Large pails, baskets, tubs etc. inverted over your plants is an option. Be sure that the pail is deep enough so as not to break the stem on your plant. Commercial "row covers" (fabric or plastic construction) installed over hoops are ideal. Some, (called "floating" covers) are constructed of very light fabric material and do not require hoops, but can rest directly on your crop. The material used for these will allow light and water through, so the coverings can be left on until all danger of frost has passed. These have the additional advantage of insulating your plant during a cool Spring, and offers some protection against insect damage. Then there is always the old stand-by, old bed sheets, tablecloths, plastic sheets etc. These do work very well to protect your plants from frost. Due to their weight though, be sure that they are not being supported by your plants. Simply sticking a few stakes into the ground so the sheet is supported above your plants will work just fine.

If there is a light frost, and you have not protected your plants, you have one more chance to save them, and that is to spray them with water. This can be tricky, with timing being crucial. The plants must be sprayed just as the air temperature at crop level raises above 0 degrees C. If sprayed too soon, the water will freeze to the plants' leaves, intensifying the damage. If sprayed too late, the damage is already done. The time to spray is just as the sun rises above the horizon and the air starts to warm. Actually physically placing a thermometer or two at crop level, and keeping a close eye on them, can prove to be very helpful.

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Vegetables in general, and the majority of herbs, prefer full sun, however most will do fine in partial shade.

You can expect a high germination percentage from certain seed varieties (lettuce, radish) only under cool soil conditions. Others (beans, corn, carrot) require a higher soil temperature. If an extended period of cold/wet weather occurs immediately after planting these, the germination percentage will decrease and some seed will simply rot in the ground before germinating. Sometimes you may note that on the seed package it may say “treated with Thirum, or Maxim or Apron, etc. These are mild fungicides on the surface of the seed. Their purpose is to protect the seed from rotting before it germinates, especially if weather conditions immediately after sowing are not favorable for quick germination. Warming the soil with strips of plastic and planting the seeds in holes made in the plastic is one method that will allow earlier planting of some of these. Installing hoops and plastic row covers over your planted rows may be another option.

If you are planting a relatively small quantity of a large seed (peas, beans, corn), you will achieve faster germination if you soak these seeds in warm water overnight before planting. Many of these seeds have thick coats. Soaking them begins the re-hydration process and softens the coat, prompting the seed to break dormancy.

Growing your own fresh herbs can be very rewarding. The aroma and the taste are wonderful, and it is not difficult to do. A lot of herbs are perennial, there are exception, (for example – cumin and mustard are annual, parsley is biennial, dill self-seeds), however many will not survive the winter in our Hardiness Zone (2b). Many plants that are hardy to zone 3 will survive however if they are mulched in the fall. Especially when they are young and still ‘getting established’. Due to climate change, some hardiness zone maps have Timmins ON in a zone 3a now. Although that may be hard to believe after the winter we just had (2017-18). Winters like this past one can be particularly cruel on venerable perennials. Snow acts as an insulator, so when we experience very cold temperatures, without the benefit of a thick blanket of snow, (to protect plants/roots) higher levels of winter-kill can be expected.

If you do not have a “herb” bed or garden, and regularly roto-till your vegetable garden, consider planting those herbs that do survive our winters (lovage, chive, Russian tarragon, parsley, garlic, etc.) in your perennial flower bed. This is a great place to grow your asparagus as well.

Herbs that are not hardy in our zone can be grown as annuals. Or, in pots, allowing you to easily bring them indoors when the weather turns cold. This would be a good opportunity to prune them back and perhaps re-pot with fresh soil. This practise will also help to keep any insects etc that may be on the leaves or in the soil from moving into the house with the plant. Like all potted plants, they will need to be fertilized regularly, since the plants will use up the nutrients in the soil in the pot. Be prepared for them to grow tall and spindly since the number of hours of natural sunlight in the winter is not sufficient for proper growth. They will survive however, and you *will* have fresh herbs to snip all winter. Using a grow light during this time works well. Try to give them 16 hours of artificial light per day. When the weather warms, the herb can be pruned, perhaps repotted, and returned outdoors for the summer. Some can be grown as a house plant all year. Bay Laurel is often grown as a house plant.

Some herbs can literally take over your herb garden after a couple of years. Regular mint, horseradish, and comfrey are three such culprits. These should be grown so their roots can be contained: in a pot; or in a location that you won't be upset if it spreads. Getting rid of these once they have ‘moved in’ can prove quite difficult. They can all reproduce from root segments. Any piece of the root left in the soil can potentially produce a new plant.

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Purchasing at least some of your plants ready for you to transplant is a great way to jump-start your garden. Some plants that are shipped here from greenhouses in southern Ontario may have to be acclimatized. They may also be stressed depending on time and conditions experienced in transit. The largest plant may not necessarily be your best choice. The larger and more mature the plant, the more care it will require to successfully transplant, and the slower it may be to adapt to new conditions.

When transplanting, be sure to give your plant plenty of water. At this time, using a 'transplant' or 'rooting' fertilizer can be advantageous. These fertilizers have a higher phosphorus concentration, (the middle number of the three numbers noted on the fertilizer packaging) helping the plant to establish roots in its new 'home'. Your transplant will do this first, before continuing to grow and mature. Be sure to keep your transplants' soil moist during this period, which can take a few days, a week, or more, depending on the size and health of your transplant, and weather conditions.

Transplanting depth is also an important consideration. When transplanting tomatoes, (tomatillos too), plant a portion of the stem in the dirt. If the depth of your soil (or pot) allows it, don't be afraid to bury a good portion of the stem. Pinch the leaves off this portion of the stem. Tomatoes are particularly good at growing roots quite quickly on any part of the stem that you bury in the soil. A good, strong root system is essential for a healthy plant. Pinching the "sucker" branches off a larger fruited tomato is advised. These will not bear fruit, and you would like your plant to put its' energy into growing the tomato, not just a lot of foliage. The foliage near the bottom of the stem receives the least amount of sunlight and air circulation, thus; they do not photosynthesize efficiently. These are also the leaves that will turn yellow/brown and die off (usually caused by soil-borne pathogens). Do not be afraid to remove these. It is generally not necessary to continue to pinch sucker leaves off 'cherry' or hanging tomato varieties, but do remove any branches that begin to turn yellow/brown.

Other vegetables, like lettuce, celery, cabbage or choy for example, should maintain the same ground level on the stem as in the original pot. If at all unsure, ask when purchasing your plants. When planting your onion sets, or transplanting young onions, it is not necessary to bury the entire bulb under the earth. Full size onions grow and develop as much above ground as below the soil level.

When transplanting it is also a good time to place cages over your tomato plants. The cages slip easily over smaller plants, and your plant will grow up into it. These cages or supports are very useful for several vegetables. Peppers, tomatillo, okra, ground cherry, and eggplant can also benefit from the support afforded by these wire cages. The weight of the tomatoes, pepper or eggplant etc. could easily break the branches of the plant, or topple it entirely, especially in windy conditions. Peas can benefit from having some support as well. Peas are natural climbers. Giving them some netting, a trellis, or even just some branches shoved into the earth, is sufficient to keep the pods off the soil surface. If you are growing full sized sunflowers, especially if there are only a few in a fairly open area, supporting the stems with a good, strong pole, will help immensely when the large, heavy, sunflower forms at the top.

When it comes to planting potatoes, there are two schools of thought. Some like to plant fairly shallow (1 ½ -2 inches) (4-5 cm), and hill later. This encourages quick emergence of the plant, but requires more hilling during the growing season. Others prefer to plant deeper, resulting in not as much hilling. If you chose to plant your potatoes deep, (3, even 4 inches) (7.5- 10 cm), remember that will take longer before the plant will emerge above ground. Sometimes taking up to 3, even 4 weeks, depending on the weather. For this reason, 'deep planters' sometimes like to plant early. The ground temperature for potatoes should be at least 6°C **at planting depth**, and should be expected to stay at least that warm for the following few weeks until the plants emerge.

This bears repeating: be sure to give your young transplants plenty of room. Remember to envision the size of the mature plant and how much room *it* will require. Again...if unsure, ask where you purchase your young plant.

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Weed – a dirty 4-letter word to gardeners. Weeding can be a chore; however, it is an important one. While it is true that a few weeds will have little effect on your crop, allowing them to multiply can cause problems. Weeds take moisture and nutrients from your soil, robbing it from your crop plants. They can outgrow crop plants, overshadowing sun-loving vegetable plants. If left unchecked, they can stunt the growth of crop plants, reducing yields, or choke the crop plants out completely. Always try to evict the weeds before they mature and produce seed, which will result in many new weeds. Try to remove as much of the root as possible, many species can propagate from root segments left in the ground. As a general rule, weeds should *never* be thrown into your compost pile. Any seeds could germinate, or root segments continue growing.

Some vegetables could benefit from hilling. Care must be taken when doing this (or weeding) to ensure the roots of the crop plants are not damaged. Grab a hoe and hill dirt up around your potato plants. Potatoes growing near the surface of the soil are exposed to light, and it is the light that will cause them to turn green. This is also what causes green shoulders on carrots. So, when you are thinning your carrots, and pulling those tasty ‘baby’ carrots out, be sure to hill some soil up around the remaining ones. Corn is another crop that is hilled, but for a different reason. Corn grows tall, and is ‘top heavy’ when mature, so it requires deep, strong roots to protect it from wind damage. Corn also benefits from being planted in a block of rows as opposed to a single long row, not only does this offer some protection from wind damage, it aids in pollination (corn is wind pollinated).

Do not weed, cultivate, harvest, or work in your bean patch especially, if the plants are wet. Be it due to rain, watering, or just dew. This will cause Bean Rust, and Blight, and spread Mosaic or other diseases.

If container gardening potatoes or carrots; first ensure that you have a deep container. For potatoes, only fill it 2/3 full of soil at planting time. Instead of hilling, you simply add another layer of soil to your container as required.

When in-ground gardening, hoeing up a row before planting a root-crop seed can add a few inches to your soil depth.

Some of the first vegetables you will be able to enjoy from your garden are radish, lettuce, and green onions. Herbs too! Do not allow the radish to stay in the ground too long, they will become pithy, dry and fibrous. In order to enjoy crisp, juicy radishes, they need to be harvested once they reach maturity.

Depending on the type of lettuce you are growing, there are different harvesting methods. Head lettuce of course, is cut off and harvested whole (like cabbage). Romaine and Swiss Chard can continue to produce through the season if you harvest only the larger, outer leaves; leaving the center of the plant to continue growing. Both Romaine and Swiss Chard are slow to bolt to seed. Unless we get an exceptionally long heat wave, and you are not regularly harvesting the larger leaves, you could well have these producing in your garden into the Fall. Leaf lettuces, mustard greens and many ‘Boston’ types can be cut off about ¾ inch (2 cm) above ground level, and they will re-grow. You can expect to get at least three cuttings, often more depending on weather conditions. Be sure to keep the roots of the freshly cut leaf lettuce moist so they can produce more leaves. This is something requiring extra attention if the weather is warm and windy, and the soil is drying quickly. Leaf Lettuce roots are not particularly long.

Green onions (seeded or pre-started) will give you an edible onion for your salad quite quickly. Green onions can be left in the ground and harvested as needed. While they will fill out somewhat, they will retain the ‘green onion’ form and flavour, and will not develop into large onions. Alternatively, you can plant your onion sets too close together, and thin the rows, using the onions you pull as green onions, early in the season.

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Zucchini (summer squash) and cucumber are vegetables that mature rather quickly, and you can start enjoying them. Picking the mature vegetable from the plant regularly encourages the plant to produce more. This is true of most vegetables. Pick 'traditionally shaped' zucchini when it is about 6-7 inches (15-18 cm) long. Leaving the zucchini (or cucumber) on the plant too long will reduce overall yields from that plant. If you would like a couple of large zucchini for baking, try to wait until later in the summer to allow those certain ones to continue growing. This way your plant will have already produced multiple smaller ones for your enjoyment.

The opposite may be true for say, watermelon or pumpkin, where you may want a larger 'fruit' instead of several small ones. Once a nice pumpkin or melon has begun to grow on a particular vine, pinch off others that may form on the same vine, forcing that vine to send its' nutrients to only one fruit. Placing something under your growing melon or squash to cradle it just above ground level goes a long way to prevent it from starting to rot, especially if the soil is wet or damp for any length of time. Be sure whatever you use allows air flow under it, and water to flow through it freely. Commercial products are available to purchase, specifically for this purpose.

Cherry tomatoes are quick to mature as well. They are oh so tasty, while you wait patiently for the larger, main season tomatoes to mature.

Snow and snap peas are another early vegetable. Regular peas typically take just a little longer. Peas must not be allowed to over-mature. Snow peas should be harvested before the pods 'plump up'; snap and regular peas, as soon as the pods plump up and feel full. Over-mature peas are dry, bitter and tough, as opposed to the juicy, sweet, tender peas you want to be eating. This requires that you pick your peas every few days, since pods mature at different rates. Be careful not to damage the immature pods or the blossoms.

Try placing an opaque tube (pails with the bottom cut out, lengths of sauno-tube, etc.) over your celery plants. This will force the celery to grow tall (towards the light) giving you tall stalks instead of a shorter, bushy plant. It also serves to blanch the stalks. If you find that bugs, especially earwigs and slugs, are drawn to the dark, damp conditions at the base of your tube, try elevating the tube above ground level (about an inch or so seems to be sufficient). This allows airflow at the base, and conditions there are no longer so inviting to pests.

Collard Greens (Leaf Cabbage) begins to produce leaves that are large enough to harvest quite early; perhaps a month before your regular head cabbage is mature. The leaves grow in a large, open rosette form, allowing you to harvest the larger leaves, leaving the plant to produce more. They have a mild cabbage flavour, and are used much the same as you would regular cabbage.

Traditional kohlrabi varieties mature quite quickly as well, and must be harvested when mature. They will become pithy, fibrous, and dry if left to over-mature (much like radish). There are a couple of newer varieties now that grow to a larger diameter, and while they can be harvested and enjoyed at a small diameter, they will not quickly become pithy and fibrous if left to grow larger. This affords you a much longer harvesting window, enjoying these well into the fall.

Keep an eye on your broccoli, especially if the weather is hot. That beautiful head of broccoli can bolt and flower seemingly overnight. Once you have cut the main, large 'head', do not compost your plant. Most varieties will continue producing side shoots, providing you with countless broccoli harvests until heavy fall frosts. Broccoli is hardy, and will typically survive a light frost, continuing to produce.

Watch your cauliflower as well. When the head is the size of a large fist, the large, outer leaves need to be tied over it. This acts to keep the head tight and discourages yellowing. Special bands are available, but large elastic bands, stretchy plant ties, even string will work. Some types are better 'self-blanchers' than others; that is their leaves naturally grow tighter over the heads.

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Green peppers can be picked and used as soon as you deem them large enough. If you wish coloured peppers, leave them on the plant to mature, and turn colour. Most green peppers at the supermarket are actually red peppers picked before they've matured and turned red. That is why you may find coloured peppers sweeter, and why they are typically more expensive. It is also why some people have trouble digesting green peppers, but can tolerate coloured peppers. The same is true of hot peppers. Most hot peppers will turn colour if allowed to fully mature on the plant. They also get 'hotter' as they mature. These too can be picked green. When dealing with hot peppers, it may be wise to wear gloves, and, especially when cutting into the pepper, eye protection.

Beans (wax, string,) should never be allowed to over-mature on the plant; they will become tough and almost 'woody' to the taste. Keep an eye on your bean plants and harvest the mature beans regularly (every few days at least). Harvesting the mature beans will encourage the plant to produce more. Be careful not to damage immature bean pods and blossoms when picking.

Kale should be harvested by removing the large leaves near the bottom of the stem, leaving the plant to produce more. Kale can be left in the garden well into the fall. It is very hardy. Cabbage too can be left to grow well into the fall. If you harvest a head of cabbage early, try leaving the root and stem in the ground, and score the top of the cut stem with an 'X', using a sharp knife. (1/4 inch (1 cm) deep is plenty) The stem will then grow 3-4 mini cabbages on it.

Carrots too can be left in the ground well into the fall. While they can be pulled at any time once they are large enough to utilize, they can be left in the ground until temperatures drop to the point where the ground starts to freeze.

Potatoes, typically are harvested when the green, above-ground plant dies back. At this point the potatoes will have reached their full size. These too can be dug earlier for 'baby' potatoes.

After harvesting your main season (winter) squash, (butternut, acorn, kabacha, butternut etc.), store it at about room temperature of a week or two. This gives the starches in the squash a chance to convert to sugars, giving you a much tastier squash. After which they should be stored in a cool, dark, dry location.

When judging if your corn is 'ripe' and ready to pick, there are a few things to look for. The silks on top of the cob dry up when the ear is almost ready to be picked. Feel the tip of the ear; if it feels rounded instead of pointed, the ear is mature. While peeling back a bit of the husk and having a look seems like the easiest way, you may be inviting bird or insect damage to the ear if you must leave it to continue maturing. As soon as you pick an ear of sweet corn, the sugars in the kernels begin to convert to starch. For the sweetest corn, pick as close to consumption time as possible. This process slows with cooler temperatures, so if you're not eating your corn right away, refrigerate the ears. Corn is not hardy, and a frost will kill your plants quickly.

Brussels sprouts are actually tastier if left on the plant until after the first fall frosts or snows. They will not be as bitter. Once the sprouts begin to form, removing some of the lower, larger leaves is usually suggested; so they are not robbing nutrients from the developing sprouts. The sprouts at the bottom of the stem mature first. Once the bottom-most sprouts are near maturity (about 1 inch diameter, and firm) removing the top of the plant as well will encourage the remainder of the sprouts to mature. Rutabega and parsnips, as well, taste better when harvested *after* the first few frosts in the fall.

Onions can also be left in the ground well into the fall. If your onion begins to go to seed, (tall, tough stem bearing a flower) break the stem off. Many chose to 'top' their onions as a rule. Bend or break the green above-ground leaves 3-4 inches (7-10 cm) above ground level. This allows nutrients to be utilized to grow the onion, not just a lot of 'top'. If not using the onions immediately, hang them to air dry. This will dry the outer layer of skin and allow you to store your onions.

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