

When To Plant Seeds Or Established Plants As Well As When To Direct Sow

For those who wish to get a head start on the season, February is not too early to start some seeds indoors under lights.

These plants will need to be cared for and hardened off before they can be planted in the ground, but they will flower sooner than ones started at the normal times which is generally eight to ten weeks before the last frost in your area.

Some seeds that are good to start this month include salvia, marigold, strawflower, calendula, tomatoes, artichokes, eggplants, tomatoes, ageratum, lobelia, salad burnett, larkspur, geranium, love in a mist and stocks.

Also start seeds of impatiens, yarrow, petunia, wax begonia and gerbera daisy.

Some plants have hard seeds that you need to soften or use a dremel to chip a small section off of.

Other plants grow best when they are pre-sprouted indoors using the paper towel germination technique that you can learn more about in the bonus video I have included.

Some seeds require a cold stratification or a cold, warm, cold stratification before they germinate while still others just take a long time to germinate.

Salvia is one such seed that must be pre-chilled in the refrigerator. Here is how to germinate Salvia.

- Sow the seeds in a damp paper towel and refrigerate for three weeks.
- When the seeds are removed, they should readily germinate.
- If you are germinating seeds in paper towels use tweezers to gently remove the plant from the paper toweling.
- Do not pinch or squeeze any part of the plant.
- If possible pick it up by the remaining seed.
- If not slide the tweezers under the stem and gently lift the entire plant up.
- Sit the plant on top of the soil and sprinkle vermiculite on top.
- The seedlings will grow through the vermiculite and root in the soil below.

- To keep pests such as gnats from attacking your seedlings, sprinkle diatomaceous earth on top of the soil.
- If you do not have access to diatomaceous earth, try powdered garlic and cinnamon.
- Help your seed grown plants get off to a great start by adding a teaspoon of organic kelp to the potting soil they are being grown in when you pot them up.
- You can also sprinkle a little organic kelp on top of the soil when you pot the seeds up.

Still other seeds need light or dark to germinate.

Examples of seeds that need to be exposed to the light to germinate include begonia, impatiens, coleus, petunia and snap dragon.

Examples of seed that need some light to germinate include nicotiana, cosmos, stock and cleome.

Examples of seed that need darkness to germinate include pansy, borage and sweet pea.

Starting seeds a little earlier than it says on the seed packets insures you will have blooms early in the season when the big box stores and nurseries begin setting their plants out.

Having plants in bloom at home, ready to plant in your garden, can help stop impulse buying.

While this may not be good news for the garden centers, it can help save you money.

Start a new batch of seeds every other week to help space out your crops and make sure you always have flowers in bloom throughout the growing season. This is called succession planting.

This is also a great way to time crops so you have something to harvest throughout the year.

It also helps cut down on those large harvests that usually come in the heat of summer.

Here are some basic timetables for popular crops – and you will find more information in the attached seed sowing chart –

Peppers 8 to 12 weeks before the last frost

Eggplant, onions and tomatoes 6 to 8 weeks

Broccoli and cabbage 5 to 6 weeks

Lettuce 4 to 5 weeks

Cucumber and melons 2 to 4 weeks

For those who prefer to direct sow their seeds in the garden knowing when to do that depends heavily on the plants you are growing and how soon you can get into the garden.

Preparing your garden for planting in the fall is a good idea.

This way when late winter or early spring rolls around all you have to do is plant.

I plant potatoes in the garden anywhere from the weekend after Thanksgiving up to the last week in December. These are pre-sprouted.

The way I do this is to pre-dig a trench that is two shovel depths deep. I put two to three inches of grass clippings and straw I clean out of my chicken coop in the bottom of the trench, lay the pre-sprouted potatoes on top and then cover them with grass, chicken coop straw and about a one inch layer of soil. Then I wait. Once the potato foliage starts to emerge, I start to backfill the trench with soil.

Cool crops such as peas, lettuce, kale, Swiss chard, radishes and spinach seed can be planted as early as January in most places. I am in USDA Hardiness Zone 5 – now considered Zone 6 and have planted seeds of these crops in January. I do cover them with a small hoop house often made out of tomato cages covered with a layer of frost cover and then a single layer of 6mm plastic I buy from the big box stores.

What I have found is planting these cool crops this early in the season results in plants much sooner than anticipated and the seedlings are stronger than the ones that come from seeds I plant at the appropriate time.

For plants such as tomatoes, it is possible to plant seedlings outdoors, under cover in mid-March as long as they are 8 weeks old, however if you are direct sowing seeds, wait until the last frost is over and sow immediately. This goes for all warm season crops such as eggplants and peppers. It is best however to start these crops indoors and transplant the seedlings once the last frost is over unless you have a way to protect them with a hoop house, unheated greenhouse or cold frame.

How To Harden Off Plants

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Before planting seedlings that have been grown in- doors or in a greenhouse outside, it is a good idea to harden them off.

This should be done gradually.

The same technique should be used for moving houseplants outdoors as well.

On an overcast day, move your plants outside to a protected area for a couple of hours.

Do not choose a windy day, as strong winds could damage the tender plants.

If it is sunny, put the plants in an area that receives filtered sunlight.

Plants that are not used to full sun can be easily burned or even killed if they receive too much sunlight all at once.

Do not set your plants outside the first few days if rainy weather is expected.

The rain hitting the plants could damage them.

It is best not to expose them to windy or rainy conditions until they are used to being outside.

On the first day, sit the seedlings outside for an hour or two.

As each day goes by you can increase the time the plants are left outside.

Watch your plants carefully to make sure they are not getting too much sun or wind.

Once they are used to being outside all day and the night time temperatures have risen above 50 degrees F, go ahead and plant them in the garden.

How To Plant Bare Root Plants

Unpack your bare-root, mail order plants as soon as they arrive.

You should plant them quickly to keep the roots moist.

If you are unable to plant them immediately, trim off any damaged or dangling roots.

Add a small amount of organic fertilizer or plant starter to a dark colored bucket filled with enough water to cover the plants roots.

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Be sure to mix the fertilizer and water well before adding the plants.

Submerge the plant roots in the water.

If there is not enough water in the bucket to cover the roots, add a little more.

It is important that the roots remain moist so the plant does not die.

When you are ready to put your new plants into the ground, prepare your soil first.

Dig a hole double the size of the root ball of the plant you are planting.

Mix some compost or organic fertilizer into the soil you have removed from the hole.

Remove the plants, one at a time, from their containers and inspect each one carefully.

Make a note of any damage.

Place the plant in the hole so the dirt will cover the roots.

Be sure to spread out the plant's roots.

This will encourage better root growth.

Fill in the hole with soil and then place a shoebox or a paper cone over the plant for at least one day.

If you are planting on a cloudy or overcast day, this is not necessary, nor is it necessary to do this for plants that are still dormant.

A dormant plant will not have any open leaves on it, although there may be leaf buds.

Allow a garden hose to run slowly into the hole as you are planting.

This will help the dirt settle around the plants roots.

Doing this is important because it helps eliminate any possible air holes, which could damage the plants roots.

Once your new plants are in the ground, be sure to water at least once a week.

Give the plants a good soaking to encourage the roots to grow into the ground and not directly below the ground surface.