FREE WITH THE VIMTOBA VEGETABLE STARTER KIT

Vegetable Seed Kit Planting Guide

~ seed to harvest, made simple ~

30 heirloom vegetables & culinary herbs · 28 chapters · USA-grown

WWW.VIMTOBA.COM

A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book.

This guide is the same one we hand to every customer who buys a Vimtoba seed kit. The first thirteen chapters cover the basics — what to plant first, when to water, how to know the soil is ready. After that, every chapter is one variety, start to harvest.

We trial every variety in our own home garden before writing the chapter, so the timing notes and harvest cues come from real beds, not a database. When something didn't work, we say so.

You don't need to read it cover to cover. Skim the table of contents, find your plant, and start there.

> *"Quality you can trust — across every seed we sell. If something isn't right, we make it right."*

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

28 chapters · written from our own beds, our own kitchen, our own teapot.

Quick Start — Start Here (10-Minute Setup)

Why this matters

This seed kit + guide is here to take you from seed to harvest, step-by-step — even if you've never planted anything before. Do this quick setup today so planting feels simple (not overwhelming).

What to do

Pick your setup in 60 seconds

Containers (pots): Best for patio/porch/limited space. Easiest to control.

Raised bed: Best for a neat, beginner-friendly garden area with fewer weeds.

In-ground: Best if you already have a sunny yard spot and want the lowest-cost setup.

Choose your sunniest spot

Pick the place with the most direct sun and the least shade from trees, fences, or buildings.

If you’re unsure, choose the spot that feels like the brightest part of your space.

What to buy today (minimal list)

Containers: Potting mix (not outdoor dirt). Pots with drain holes.

Raised bed / in-ground: Garden soil + compost (or a soil-compost blend).

Watering can or hose sprayer

Labels + marker (or painter’s tape + marker)

Your first wins (easy confidence crops) Pick one or two to start: (check your weather)

Radish

Lettuce

Basil

Bush green beans Why these: they’re beginner-friendly and give quick feedback so you feel progress fast. Don’t plant everything at once yet — start small and win first.

Plant the simple way

Fill your pot/space with the right soil.

Make it loose and level with your hand.

Plant a small section first so it’s easy to manage.

Label what you planted right away.

Watering rule of thumb (no stress)

Soil should feel like a wrung-out sponge: damp, not muddy.

If the top feels dry, it’s time to water.

Water the soil, not the leaves.

Start a tiny note habit Write down:

What you planted

Where you planted it

The date

Common Mistakes

- Using outdoor dirt in pots (it packs down and drains poorly).
- Planting everything at once and getting overwhelmed.
- Putting the garden in “convenient shade” instead of real sun.
- Watering on a schedule instead of checking the soil.

Quick Tips

- Start small on purpose. One pot or one small patch is a win.
- Labels prevent the #1 beginner problem: forgetting what’s what.
- If you’re nervous, plant extra seeds in a small spot — then keep the strongest later.
- You don’t need zones — just learn your local last frost date for warm-season planting later.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I picked my setup: containers / raised bed / in-ground
- [ ] I chose the sunniest spot I have
- [ ] I have the right soil for my setup
- [ ] I planted at least one easy “first win” crop
- [ ] I labeled what I planted
- [ ] I wrote a quick note (what/where/date)

What to Plant First (So You Don’t Fail)

Why this matters

Some crops like cool weather. Others need real warmth. Planting warm crops too early is the fastest way to get weak plants (or no plants).

What to do

Know this simple rule

Cool-weather crops handle chilly nights better.

Warm-weather crops want steady warmth and struggle in cold.

Step 1 — Find your local last frost date

Open Google.

Search: “last frost date + your ZIP code”

Write the date down. This is your planting “traffic light.”

(Containers follow the same rule.)

Step 2 — Use that date to choose what to plant FIRST vs LATER

Before your local last frost date: focus on cool-weather crops.

After your local last frost date: move into warm-weather crops.

Plant First (Cool-Weather Crops)

Arugula

Lettuce (Buttercrunch, Cimarron Red)

Spinach

Kale

Swiss chard

Bok choy

Radish (Cherry Belle)

Peas

Onion (Tokyo Long)

Plant After Frost (Warm-Weather Crops)

Bush green beans

Cucumbers (Slicing, Pickling)

Zucchini

Yellow summer squash

Butternut squash

Sugar pie pumpkin

Tomatoes (Large Cherry, Roma)

Peppers (Bell, Jalapeño)

Basil

Sunflower

If you’re unsure, do this

Start with one cool-weather crop first for confidence.

You’ll learn how your watering and sun setup behaves.

Mini decision rule

If nights are still cold, start cool crops.

Wait on warm crops until after your local last frost date.

Common Mistakes

- Planting tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, or squash before your local last frost date.
- Planting everything at once and not knowing what worked.
- Forgetting to save your local last frost date for later.

Quick Tips

- Cool crops are great for learning because they forgive small mistakes.
- Label “cool” and “warm” on your seed packets with a marker.
- If a warm crop struggles early, it’s usually timing — not you.
- You can often plant cool crops again later for a second round.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I Googled “last frost date + my ZIP code” and saved the date
- [ ] I picked at least one cool-weather crop to plant first
- [ ] I chose warm-weather crops to save for after my local last frost date
- [ ] I labeled what I planted and when
- [ ] I feel clear on “cool first, warm later”

Watering Made Simple (Don’t Drown Your Plants)

Why this matters

Most beginner plants don’t die from “not enough love.” They die from too much water, too often. A simple check-first habit keeps roots healthy and plants growing.

What to do

Use the check-first rule

Don’t water by a schedule.

Water based on how the soil feels right now.

Do the finger check

Press your finger into the soil near the plant.

Check a little below the surface — the top can look dry while underneath is still wet.

If it feels dry, water.

If it feels damp, wait.

If it feels soggy or sticky, stop watering and let it dry out.

Aim for “wrung-out sponge” soil

The goal is damp, not muddy.

Water should soak in, not sit on top.

Water the soil, not the leaves

Pour near the base of the plant.

Wet leaves can invite problems, especially if they stay wet.

Morning is best if possible

It gives plants time to use water during the day.

It helps leaves dry faster if they get splashed.

Containers: what to do

Containers dry out faster, so check more often.

Make sure pots have drain holes. No drain holes = trapped water.

Water until the soil is evenly damp and extra water can drain out.

Empty any saucer that holds standing water.

Beds / in-ground: what to do

Water more deeply so moisture reaches roots.

Avoid constant light sprinkling — it keeps roots shallow and the surface wet.

Water slowly so it soaks in. If water runs off, pause and let it absorb, then continue.

Know the signs Signs you’re overwatering

Soil stays soggy or smells sour

Leaves look limp but the soil is wet

Yellowing leaves without new healthy growth

Fungus or algae on the soil surface

Signs you’re underwatering

Soil pulls away from pot edges or looks dusty

Leaves droop and perk up after watering

Crispy leaf edges or dry, curled leaves

Slow growth with dry soil

Common Mistakes

- Watering daily “just in case” instead of checking first.
- Using containers with no drain holes (or letting water sit in a saucer).
- Watering in hot sun so it evaporates fast and can stress plants.
- Light sprinkling over and over instead of watering the soil thoroughly.

Quick Tips

- Mulch (like shredded leaves or straw) helps keep moisture steady — don’t pile it against stems.
- If you’re unsure, wait and check again soon — plants handle “a little dry” better than “constantly wet.”
- Windy days dry soil faster, especially in containers.
- **Use labels/notes:** “watered,” “soil was dry,” “soil was damp.”

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I water based on soil feel, not a schedule
- [ ] I do a quick finger check before I water
- [ ] My soil feels like a wrung-out sponge (damp, not muddy)
- [ ] My containers have drain holes and don’t sit in standing water
- [ ] I water the soil near the base, not the leaves
- [ ] I avoid constant light sprinkling in beds/in-ground

Planting Basics (Depth, Spacing, and Thinning — Without the Confusion)

Why this matters

Most seed “failures” come from a few fixable basics: planting too deep, crowding, or skipping thinning. Learn the concepts now, and the crop pages will feel easy.

What to do

Understand planting depth (the simple idea)

Too deep = no sprout (the seed runs out of energy before it reaches light).

Too shallow = dries out (the seed can’t stay evenly moist).

Most seeds do best shallow. Bigger seeds can go a bit deeper than tiny seeds.

Get good seed-to-soil contact

Seeds sprout best when they touch moist soil.

After you cover seeds, press the soil gently with your palm or fingertips.

Don’t pack it hard — just firm it so the seed isn’t floating in air gaps.

Cover lightly

Use loose soil to cover the seeds.

Think “light blanket,” not “buried treasure.”

Water gently after planting

Moisten the soil without moving the seeds.

Use a gentle shower setting or carefully pour so it soaks in.

If seeds appear on top, smooth and re-cover lightly.

Understand spacing (why plants need room)

Crowded plants compete for light, water, and food.

Crowding reduces airflow and can invite problems.

If seedlings are touching, it’s time to thin.

Thin seedlings (this is not “wasting plants”)

When multiple seedlings sprout close together, they can’t all thrive in the same spot.

Thinning helps the remaining plants grow bigger and healthier.

Think “choosing the strongest team,” not throwing plants away.

How to thin (beginner-friendly)

Wait until seedlings look clearly established and you can spot the strongest ones.

Keep the healthiest-looking seedlings (upright, sturdy, good color).

Best method: snip extras at soil level with small scissors.

Pulling can disturb the roots of the seedling you want to keep.

Label right away

Label the crop name as soon as you plant.

Add the planting date if you can.

Common Mistakes

- Planting too deep and giving up when nothing appears.
- Watering with a strong stream and washing seeds out of place.
- Letting seedlings stay crowded because thinning feels wasteful.
- Forgetting to label, then not knowing what's sprouting.

Quick Tips

- Tiny seeds need extra gentle watering so they don't float away.
- If you're nervous about depth, plant slightly shallow and cover lightly — then keep the surface evenly moist.
- Thinning feels hard the first time, but it's one of the fastest ways to improve results.
- A simple label beats "I'll remember" every time.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I planted seeds shallow and covered lightly
- [ ] I gently pressed the soil for seed-to-soil contact
- [ ] I watered gently without washing seeds away
- [ ] I understand crowding hurts growth and airflow
- [ ] I'm willing to thin by snipping extras at soil level
- [ ] I labeled what I planted right away

Your First 2 Weeks (Simple Daily/Weekly Routine)

Why this matters

The first days are when beginners accidentally “kill with kindness.” A simple check-based routine keeps you calm, consistent, and on track.

What to do

What you’re watching for (keep it simple)

Moisture: soil damp like a wrung-out sponge, not soggy

Sunlight: is your spot staying sunny, or getting shaded?

Sprouts: tiny green tips breaking the surface

Pests: holes, chewed edges, bugs on leaves

Crowding: too many seedlings packed together

Daily (takes 2 minutes) Check soil feel first

Touch the soil near where you planted.

If it’s damp, don’t water.

If it’s dry, water gently.

Look for sprouts

Scan the planted area for tiny green growth.

Once sprouts appear, avoid blasting them with water.

Check sun/shade

Notice if a fence, tree, or building is casting more shade than you expected.

If your spot is becoming shady, make a note (don’t panic-move everything).

Quick pest glance

Look under a couple leaves if you have seedlings.

Look for chewing, sticky spots, or clusters of tiny bugs.

Write a one-line note

Example: “Soil damp, no sprouts yet,” or “Sprouts! Leaves look good.”

Occasional tune-ups Pull tiny weeds

Remove weeds while they’re small so they don’t steal water and light.

Refresh labels

Make sure labels are readable and in the right spot.

Thin if crowded (when seedlings are up)

If many seedlings are packed together, choose the strongest and snip extras at soil level.

Thinning helps the remaining plants grow bigger and healthier.

Add light mulch if needed

If the soil surface dries out quickly, a thin layer of mulch helps hold moisture.

Adjust based on weather

Wind and sun dry things out faster (especially containers).

Cool, cloudy stretches keep soil wet longer.

Let soil feel guide you — not the calendar.

When to worry vs when to wait Wait when:

You don’t see sprouts yet, but the soil is staying lightly moist.

The surface looks quiet — seeds often take time.

Some seeds sprout unevenly (a few first, then more later).

Worry when:

Soil stays soggy and smells sour (ease up on watering).

Seedlings fall over at the base or look mushy (improve airflow, avoid wet leaves).

Leaves are getting chewed fast (check for pests more closely).

Big rule: don’t dig up seeds “to check.” It usually makes things worse.

Do NOT do this (early on)

Don’t overwater “just in case.”

Don’t constantly move pots around trying to find the perfect spot.

Don’t replant too soon because you’re impatient.

Don’t dig up seeds to see if they’re sprouting.

Don’t fertilize immediately — young seedlings can be sensitive.

Common Mistakes

- Panicking and changing everything at once (water, light, location).
- Watering on a routine instead of checking the soil.
- Letting weeds get established before noticing them.
- Skipping thinning and ending up with weak, crowded plants.

Quick Tips

- The goal is consistency, not perfection.
- If you’re unsure, check the soil again later before watering.
- **Photos help:** snap a quick picture sometimes to see progress.
- One-line notes turn confusion into learning fast.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I do a quick soil-feel check before watering
- [ ] I scan for sprouts and pests without disturbing the soil
- [ ] I keep a one-line note about what I see
- [ ] I remove small weeds when I notice them
- [ ] I’m prepared to thin crowded seedlings by snipping extras
- [ ] I’m not digging up seeds or replanting too soon

Feeding Your Plants (The Simple Beginner Approach)

Why this matters

Healthy soil does most of the work. Overfeeding early on can hurt plants faster than underfeeding. This keeps feeding calm, gentle, and beginner-safe.

What to do

Start with the core idea

Seeds already contain what they need to sprout.

Good soil + steady watering gets you far.

Feeding is a support tool — not the main job.

Start simple (best beginner move)

Use quality soil for your setup:

Containers: potting mix

Beds/in-ground: garden soil + compost (or a soil-compost blend)

Compost is the safest “first feed.” It improves soil over time.

Feeding won’t fix poor drainage — fix water + drainage first.

When feeding helps (general signs)

New growth looks pale compared to healthy green.

Growth is slow after the plant has clearly started growing and settling in.

Later on, heavy producers may need extra support:

Tomatoes

Peppers

Squash family (zucchini, yellow squash, butternut, pumpkin)

If you’re unsure, take a quick photo and note what you see for a few days before changing anything.

When NOT to feed

Right after planting seeds.

When seedlings are tiny and still getting established.

When plants look stressed (droopy from heat, freshly transplanted, pest damage).

When soil is soggy or waterlogged.

When you’re not sure if the real issue is sun or watering.

Beginner-safe gentle options (choose ONE, keep it simple)

Compost top-dress: add a light layer on the surface and water it in.

Compost tea / mild organic liquid feed: follow label directions.

Slow-release balanced fertilizer: use later; follow label directions.

Don’t mix options at the same time.

The simple rule

If you feed, start gentle and watch the plant. (Use the mildest label guidance.)

Look for better color and steady new growth.

If plants look worse, pause feeding and go back to basics (sun + watering + drainage).

Watering first, feeding second

Never feed dry soil — water first.

If soil is already too wet, skip feeding until it’s back to normal damp.

Use your journal

One line is enough:

“Top-dressed compost today”

“Pale leaves — waiting and watching”

“Fed lightly — watching new growth”

Common Mistakes

- Feeding too early because sprouts “look small.”
- Overfeeding to “speed things up.”
- Feeding when soil is waterlogged or plants are stressed.
- Mixing multiple products and not knowing what caused the problem.

Quick Tips

- Compost is hard to overdo compared to strong fertilizers.
- One change at a time helps you learn what actually worked.
- Many “needs fertilizer” moments are really watering or sunlight issues.
- If you use any product, follow label directions.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I’m starting with quality soil and compost as my foundation
- [ ] I’m not feeding right after planting seeds or when plants are tiny
- [ ] I check watering and sunlight before assuming it’s a feeding issue
- [ ] If I feed, I start gentle and watch the plant’s response
- [ ] I water first and never feed dry soil
- [ ] I write a one-line note when I add anything to the soil

Soil Basics That Actually Matter (Drainage First)

Why this matters

Roots need both water AND air. If soil stays soggy, roots can’t breathe and plants struggle fast. Get drainage right and gardening becomes much easier.

What to do

Start with the core idea

Water is important, but roots also need air spaces in the soil.

Soil that stays muddy can cause root problems and slow growth.

Drainage basics (containers)

Use containers with drain holes. No holes = trapped water.

After watering, water should be able to leave the pot.

If a saucer holds water, empty it so roots aren't sitting in it.

Drainage basics (beds / in-ground)

Avoid low spots where water collects after rain.

Watch after watering or rain:

If water sits on the surface or the area stays swampy, drainage is an issue.

If you can't change spots, build up a small mound/raised row or use containers.

What good soil looks and feels like

Loose and crumbly, not packed like clay.

Breaks apart easily in your hand, not in hard clumps.

Holds moisture but doesn't stay muddy or sticky.

Smells earthy, not sour.

Quick feel test: squeeze a handful — it should crumble, not stay a sticky ball.

Simple improvements (keep it beginner-safe)

Containers: use potting mix (not outdoor dirt).

Beds / in-ground: add compost to improve soil over time.

Compost helps heavy soil drain better and helps sandy soil hold moisture longer.

What NOT to do

Don't try to "fix" soggy soil by fertilizing. Fertilizer doesn't fix drainage.

Don't stomp soil down or work it when it's wet — it compacts and drains worse.

Don't aggressively till wet soil "to fluff it up." It can turn into hard clumps later.

When plants struggle, check this order

Drainage

Sun

Watering habits

Only then start blaming seeds.

Common Mistakes

- Using outdoor dirt in containers (it packs down and traps water).
- Planting in a low spot where water collects.
- Working soil when it’s wet and turning it into a compacted mess.
- Adding fertilizer when the real issue is soggy soil.

Quick Tips

- A pot with drain holes beats a fancy pot with none.
- If soil stays muddy, pause watering and let it dry before changing anything else.
- Compost is the easiest upgrade for beds and in-ground gardens.
- If your spot stays wet after rain, consider containers or a raised area instead.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] My containers have drain holes and don’t hold standing water
- [ ] My garden spot doesn’t stay waterlogged after watering or rain
- [ ] My soil feels loose and crumbly, not packed into hard clumps
- [ ] I’m using potting mix for containers (not outdoor dirt)
- [ ] I’m improving beds/in-ground soil with compost over time
- [ ] If plants struggle, I’ll check drainage + sun + watering first

Sunlight Basics (What “Full Sun” Really Means)

Why this matters

If plants don’t get enough sun, they grow slow and weak — even with great seeds. Put your garden in the right light, and everything becomes easier.

What to do

Know the simple sunlight words

Full sun: lots of direct sun on the plant

Part sun: mixed sun and shade through the day

Shade: mostly indirect light, with little direct sun

Bright shade is still shade — plants need direct sun, not just daylight.

The core idea

Most vegetables want a lot of sun.

Leafy greens tolerate less sun than fruiting crops (tomatoes, peppers, squash).

If a sun-hungry crop gets too much shade, it won't perform well.

Find your best spot (beginner method)

Go outside and notice where sun hits:

Morning

Midday

Late day

Watch for shifting shade from:

Trees

Buildings

Fences

Overhangs

Pick the spot that stays sunny the longest and has the least shade.

If you can't observe in real time, make quick notes when you pass by.

Containers vs beds (how to use sun smart)

Beds/in-ground: choose the sunniest location before you plant. Hard to change later.

Containers: you can "chase the sun" a bit by moving a pot to a brighter spot.

Don't move constantly — plants like a stable home.

Move for a clear reason (more sun), then leave it there.

If you don’t have perfect sun

Grow leafy greens + herbs in part sun.

Put sun-hungry crops in the brightest spot you have.

Use light to your advantage:

Bright walls/fences can bounce extra light onto plants.

Keep it safe and simple — avoid mirrors/foil that can create hot spots.

If you only have one great sunny spot, give it to fruiting crops first.

How to tell if sun is the real problem

Slow growth even with good watering

Leggy seedlings (tall, skinny, leaning toward light)

Weak plants that flop easily

Low flowering/fruiting on crops that should produce

Best sun crops (sun-hungry)

Tomatoes (Large Cherry, Roma)

Peppers (Bell, Jalapeño)

Cucumbers (Slicing, Pickling)

Squash family (zucchini, yellow squash, butternut, sugar pie pumpkin)

Bush green beans

Sunflower

More shade-tolerant crops (more forgiving)

Lettuce (Buttercrunch, Cimarron Red)

Spinach

Arugula

Kale

Swiss chard

Parsley

Cilantro

Common Mistakes

- Planting in convenient shade because it’s closer to the door or hose.
- Moving containers too often and stressing plants.
- Expecting tomatoes or peppers to thrive in part sun.
- Blaming seeds before checking sun and watering.

Quick Tips

- If you’re unsure, start leafy greens first — they teach you fast.
- Leggy seedlings usually mean “more light,” not “bad seeds.”
- Pick one “best sun” spot and commit to it for a while.
- Take a quick photo from the same angle — it helps you spot weak, stretchy growth.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I understand full sun vs part sun vs shade
- [ ] I found the sunniest spot by observing morning/midday/late day light
- [ ] I placed sun-hungry crops in my brightest location
- [ ] I chose leafy greens/herbs if my space is part sun
- [ ] I’m not moving pots constantly — only for a clear sun upgrade
- [ ] If plants struggle, I’ll check sunlight before blaming seeds

Direct Sow vs Start Indoors (Simple Decision Guide)

Why this matters

Choosing the right planting method makes success much easier. This helps you decide fast — without complicated calendars.

What to do

Know the simple definitions

Direct sow: plant seeds where they will grow (outside in your container, bed, or ground).

Direct sow works in containers too — it just means “final spot.”

Start indoors: start seeds in small containers inside, then move them outside later.

Why choose direct sow (simple pros/cons) Pros

Simplest setup

No transplanting step

Many plants grow strong this way

Cons

Weather can slow things down

Seeds can be disturbed by heavy rain, wind, or pests

Why choose starting indoors (simple pros/cons) Pros

More control (warmth, moisture)

Can give you a head start before your local last frost date

Helpful for slower-starting crops

Cons

More gear and attention

You must transplant later

Transplant shock: plants can droop or pause growth after moving outside

Easiest beginner path

Simplest route: direct sow most of your garden.

If you want a head start: start indoors only a couple crops, and direct sow the rest.

If you want simplest: direct sow these (often easiest)

Radish (Cherry Belle)

Peas

Bush green beans

Cucumbers (Slicing, Pickling)

Zucchini

Yellow summer squash

Butternut squash

Sugar pie pumpkin

Sunflower

Arugula (optional)

Lettuce (optional)

Dill (optional)

Cilantro (optional)

If you want a head start: start indoors these (often helpful)

Tomatoes (Large Cherry, Roma)

Peppers (Bell, Jalapeño)

Basil (optional)

Broccoli (optional)

Cabbage (optional)

Either works (many people succeed either way)

Lettuce (Buttercrunch, Cimarron Red)

Kale

Swiss chard

Bok choy

Parsley

Use your local last frost date (conceptually)

Many gardeners wait to move warm-loving seedlings outside until after the local last frost date.

Cool-weather crops are often more flexible.

Minimal beginner indoor setup (keep it simple)

Small cups or a seed tray (with drainage)

Potting mix

Light source (bright window or a simple grow light)

Labels + marker

Gentle watering method (small cup, squeeze bottle, or light sprayer)

Your beginner plan

Pick one or two crops to start indoors (like tomatoes and peppers).

Direct sow the rest.

This keeps you learning without getting overwhelmed.

Common Mistakes

- Starting too many crops indoors and getting overwhelmed.
- Using outdoor dirt indoors instead of potting mix.
- Forgetting labels and mixing seedlings up.
- Transplanting stressed seedlings instead of fixing light and watering first.

Quick Tips

- Starting indoors is optional — you can still grow a great garden by direct sowing.
- Label indoor cups right away. It's easy to forget what's what.
- If seedlings look tall and stretchy indoors, they usually need more light.
- **To reduce transplant shock:** water before moving, start in shade, then move into more sun.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I understand direct sow vs start indoors
- [ ] I chose a mostly direct-sow plan for simplicity
- [ ] I picked only one or two crops to start indoors (if any)
- [ ] I have a minimal indoor setup (cups/tray, potting mix, light, labels)
- [ ] I'm using my local last frost date to guide warm crops moving outside
- [ ] I expect a short adjustment period after transplanting

Indoor Seed Starting Basics (Light, Water, and Airflow)

Why this matters

Most indoor seedlings fail for simple reasons: not enough light, too much water, and stale air. Fix those three, and indoor starting becomes predictable.

What to do

Start with a minimal setup

Seed tray or small cups with drainage

Potting mix (light, indoor-friendly)

Labels + marker

A bright window or a simple grow light

The 3 keys indoors

Light: strong enough so seedlings don’t stretch

Water: damp, not soggy

Airflow: gentle fresh air to discourage mold and collapse

Light: prevent stretchy seedlings

Put seedlings in your brightest spot or under a light source.

A bright room is not the same as strong plant light.

Rotate the tray if seedlings lean strongly toward one direction.

Sign: tall, thin, leaning seedlings = not enough light.

Fix: move to stronger light (brighter window or grow light).

Water: keep soil damp, not muddy

Use the “wrung-out sponge” feel.

Water gently so you don’t flatten tiny seedlings.

Bottom watering is OK:

Add water to a tray below so soil drinks from the bottom.

Then remove extra water so cups don’t sit in it.

Never let cups sit in water. Soggy roots cause problems fast.

Water the soil, not the leaves.

Airflow: reduce mold and seedling collapse

Give seedlings fresh air — stale, humid air causes trouble.

A small fan on a gentle setting can help (don’t blast seedlings directly).

Avoid crowding trays tightly together.

Signs → quick fixes (simple and calm)

Leggy seedlings (tall, skinny, weak)

Cause: too little light

Fix: stronger light + rotate tray + steady watering

Mushy/collapsing seedlings (falling over near the soil line)

Cause: too wet + low airflow

Fix: let soil dry slightly, increase airflow, avoid wet leaves, remove the worst ones

Before moving outdoors (tiny preview)

Indoor plants need a gradual change to outside conditions.

Wind, sun, and temperature swings can shock them if you move them suddenly.

Common Mistakes

- Starting seedlings in low light and wondering why they stretch.
- Keeping soil constantly wet and losing seedlings to collapse.
- Using cups with no drainage.
- Spraying leaves often and keeping everything too humid.

Quick Tips

- Labels save you. Indoor seedlings look surprisingly similar at first.
- If the soil is damp, don’t water again “just in case.”
- If you see algae or fuzzy growth, reduce watering and increase airflow.
- One change at a time helps you learn what worked.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] My tray/cups have drainage and are filled with potting mix
- [ ] My seedlings are in strong light (bright window or grow light)
- [ ] I’m watering based on soil feel (damp, not soggy)
- [ ] I never let cups sit in standing water
- [ ] I have gentle airflow (not stale, trapped humidity)
- [ ] I understand indoor seedlings need a gradual move outdoors

Hardening Off (Move Plants Outdoors Without Shock)

Why this matters

Indoor seedlings are “soft.” Outdoors has stronger sun, wind, and temperature swings. Hardening off helps plants adjust so they don’t burn, wilt, or stall.

What to do

What “hardening off” means

Hardening off = gradually introducing indoor plants to outdoor sun, wind, and temperatures.

When to do it (simple guidance)

Do this before you transplant indoor-started seedlings into their final outdoor spot.

Warm-loving crops are often moved out after your local last frost date.

Step-by-step (no stress, no numbers) Start in shade and shelter

Put seedlings outside in bright shade, protected from wind.

Bright shade = you can see a clear shadow, but it’s soft.

Good spots: porch, under an overhang, beside a wall, sheltered corner.

Avoid harsh midday sun at first

Early direct sun can sunburn indoor leaves quickly.

Keep first outings gentle: shade, filtered light, or soft morning/late-day light.

Increase outdoor exposure gradually

Add a little more sun and open-air time each outing.

If plants look happy, keep progressing.

If they look stressed, back up to more shade/shelter and go slower.

Protect from cold nights and harsh wind early on

If nights feel cold or winds are strong, bring plants in or tuck them under cover.

Wind can dry seedlings fast and bend stems.

Where to place them (simple options)

Bright shade under a tree (not deep shade)

A porch or stoop with indirect light

Under a patio umbrella or awning

Next to a light-colored wall for reflected light (avoid heat traps)

What to watch for

Slight droop that recovers: usually normal adjustment

Severe wilt: stays limp even after shade + water → too much sun/wind too fast

Sunburn: bleached/white/papery patches → reduce sun and go slower

Wind damage: torn leaves, bent stems, drying out fast → move to a sheltered spot

After plants handle outdoors

Transplant gently (don't rough up roots).

Water in well so soil settles around roots.

Give them a gentle day after transplanting (not full blast sun immediately).

A little droop can be normal — don't panic and start re-potting.

Common Mistakes

- Moving seedlings from indoors straight into full sun.
- Leaving plants out on a cold night or in strong wind too soon.
- Forgetting to water and then blaming the sun.
- Handling plants constantly (moving, repotting, replanting) during the transition.

Quick Tips

- A sheltered "training spot" outside makes hardening off easy.
- Keep labels on — seedlings look similar, especially outdoors.
- Water before plants get stressed. Don't wait for dramatic wilting.
- If you're unsure, go slower. Slow is fast in gardening.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I understand hardening off means gradual outdoor exposure
- [ ] I started seedlings in bright shade with wind protection
- [ ] I avoided harsh midday sun at first
- [ ] I'm increasing exposure based on how plants respond
- [ ] I'm protecting plants from cold nights and harsh wind early on
- [ ] Once they're ready, I'll transplant gently and water in

Pests & Problems (Beginner Troubleshooting: What to Check First)

Why this matters

When something looks “wrong,” it’s easy to panic and overcorrect. Most garden problems start with water, sun, and soil — not bugs or disease.

What to do

Check in this order (don’t skip steps) 1) Soil moisture

Feel the soil near the plant.

Too wet or too dry causes most beginner issues.

2) Sunlight

Is the plant getting plenty of direct sun?

Has shade shifted since you planted?

3) Drainage / airflow / crowding

Is water draining well (especially in containers)?

Are seedlings crowded with poor airflow?

Do leaves stay wet for long?

4) Pests

Look closely, especially under leaves and along stems.

Check at different times of day if you don’t see anything at first.

5) Disease (only after basics are checked)

Many “disease-looking” issues improve when watering and airflow improve.

If multiple plants look bad at once, it’s usually the environment — not the seeds.

Common symptoms → likely causes (fast clues) Yellow leaves

Often: overwatering, soggy soil, low light, or stress

Sometimes: plants asking for better nutrition later (check basics first)

Drooping

If soil is dry: underwatering or heat stress

If soil is wet: overwatering or poor drainage

Holes / chewed leaves

Often: insects feeding at night or hiding under leaves

Check leaf undersides and around the soil line

White/gray dusty coating

Often: low airflow + leaves staying damp

Improve spacing/airflow and avoid wetting leaves (skip overhead watering)

Seedlings collapsing

Often: soil too wet + low airflow

Let soil dry slightly, improve airflow, avoid wet leaves

Beginner-safe responses (simple, gentle) Adjust watering

Water based on soil feel, not a schedule.

Aim for damp soil, not muddy.

Improve airflow / reduce crowding

Thin crowded seedlings.

Give plants room so air can move between leaves.

Rinse pests off

A gentle spray of water can knock off many small pests.

Re-check later and repeat if needed.

Hand-pick when possible

Remove visible bugs by hand and discard.

Remove heavily damaged leaves

If a leaf is mostly destroyed, remove it so the plant can focus on new growth.

Protect young plants

Light cover or netting can protect seedlings while they’re small.

Secure edges so pests don’t crawl underneath.

Make sure plants still get light and airflow.

When to take action vs when to wait Wait when:

The plant looks a little off, but new growth still looks healthy.

You recently changed something (moved a pot, transplanted, heavy rain).

Take action when:

Damage is spreading quickly.

You see active pests.

Soil is staying soggy or plants repeatedly wilt.

Make one change at a time so you know what helped.

Use photos + notes

Take a quick photo when you notice a problem.

Write one line: “yellow leaves + soil wet,” or “holes + pests under leaves.”

Common Mistakes

- Spraying or treating “just in case” without checking soil and sun first.
- Overwatering after seeing droop (droop can happen in wet soil too).
- Ignoring crowding and skipping thinning.
- Changing multiple things at once and not knowing what worked.

Quick Tips

- Check the underside of leaves — many pests hide there.
- Many issues improve by fixing watering and airflow first.
- Morning watering helps leaves stay drier (if possible).
- If you’re unsure, step back: soil feel + sun check usually reveals the issue.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I checked soil moisture before doing anything else
- [ ] I confirmed the plant is getting enough direct sun
- [ ] I checked drainage, airflow, and crowding (and thinned if needed)
- [ ] I inspected under leaves and along stems for pests
- [ ] I made one simple change and watched the result
- [ ] I took a photo and wrote a one-line note for tracking

Harvest Basics (Pick Often, Pick Right, Keep Plants Producing)

Why this matters

Harvesting is part of growing. Many plants make more food when you pick regularly. Harvest the right way and your garden keeps producing instead of stopping.

What to do

Start with the core idea

Picking isn’t “taking away.” It’s a signal to many plants to keep growing.

Regular harvesting often improves tenderness, flavor, and production.

Know simple “ready to harvest” cues Leafy greens

Pick the outer leaves first.

Leave the center growing point so the plant keeps making new leaves.

Don’t strip the plant bare — leave plenty behind so it can keep powering growth.

Herbs

Pinch or clip stems regularly.

Avoid taking the whole plant at once — leave healthy growth behind.

If a plant starts trying to flower, regular picking helps keep it in “leaf mode.”

Fruiting crops

Pick when fruits look full-colored for their type, feel firm, and detach easily with a gentle twist.

Pick regularly so the plant puts energy into making more.

Root crops

Harvest when the top looks like it has “sized up” and seems worth pulling.

Don’t force a fixed size — use your eyes now, and crop page cues later.

Harvest gently (don’t damage the plant)

Use clean scissors or snips for clean cuts.

Avoid yanking or tearing — it can split stems and invite problems.

Harvest in the cooler part of the day if possible for crisper leaves and less stress.

What to do after harvesting

Check soil moisture and water if needed.

If plants look stressed (droopy from heat), give brief shade/cover and let them recover.

Store produce simply:

Keep greens cool and dry

Don’t leave harvest in hot sun

Wash right before eating (not right before storing)

Quick crop examples (from your kit)

Leafy: lettuce, arugula, spinach, kale, swiss chard, bok choy

Herbs: basil, parsley, dill, cilantro

Fruiting: tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, bush beans

Roots: radish, beet, carrot

Common Mistakes

- Cutting the growing center on leafy greens and stopping regrowth.
- Waiting too long and ending up with tough/bitter leaves or bolting plants.
- Pulling/yanking fruit and breaking stems.
- Harvesting too rarely on “cut-and-come-again” crops (greens/herbs), slowing new growth.

Quick Tips

- If you’re nervous, start small — just a few leaves or stems.
- Clean snips reduce damage and make harvesting easy.
- Regular picking can reduce bitterness and delay bolting (going to flower).
- Take a quick photo + note what you harvested — you’ll learn timing fast.

Mini Checklist

- [ ] I understand harvesting can increase production for many crops
- [ ] For leafy greens, I’m picking outer leaves and leaving the center growing point
- [ ] For herbs, I’m clipping regularly without taking the whole plant
- [ ] I’m using clean scissors/snips and avoiding yanking
- [ ] After harvesting, I check moisture and water if needed
- [ ] I keep harvested produce out of hot sun and store it simply

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Arugula

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun / Partial Shade	1/8 to 1/4 inch	1–6 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
5–15 Days	20–50 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Super fast: You can start harvesting baby leaves in less than a month.

Forgiving: Arugula is a cut-and-come-again crop. If you cut it, it regrows, giving you multiple harvests from one planting.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** ¼ inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 4–6 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 5–10 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are about 2 inches tall
- **First baby-leaf harvest:** 21–28 days
- **Mature leaf harvest:** 40–50 days
- **Heat risk:** Leaf quality drops and plants may bolt (go to seed) quickly if temperatures rise above 80–85°F

When to Plant

Arugula is a cool-weather crop. It tastes best when grown in the crisp air of spring or fall.

Spring: Plant as soon as the soil is workable. Arugula tolerates light frost well.

Fall: Plant in late summer as temperatures begin to cool.

Summer warning: Arugula struggles in high heat. Plants bolt quickly, and leaves become bitter.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is best. Arugula roots do not like being disturbed.

Prepare: Loosen the top layer of soil and remove clumps.

Sow: Scatter seeds thinly over the soil surface.

Cover: Sprinkle a light layer of soil over the seeds (about the thickness of two coins).

Pat: Gently firm the soil so seeds make good contact.

Water: Mist gently to avoid washing seeds away. (Optional: Seeds can be started indoors 3–4 weeks before transplanting, but handle roots carefully.)

Care Made Simple

Check-First Watering Arugula needs steady moisture to stay mild and sweet.

If soil feels dry → water

If damp → wait

Tip: Dry soil causes arugula to turn spicy and bitter very quickly.

Sun & Shade

Cool weather: Full sun is ideal.

Warm spells: Provide afternoon shade. Planting behind taller crops, such as tomatoes, can block intense afternoon sun.

Feeding Usually not necessary. Compost mixed into the soil before planting is sufficient.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Cut-and-come-again: Snip outer leaves with scissors when they reach 2–3 inches long.

Leave the center: Do not cut the small central rosette. New leaves grow from this point for future harvests.

Flavor note: Leaves become more peppery as they grow larger or when temperatures rise.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bolting (tall flower stalk):

What it is: A flowering stalk forms in response to heat or dryness.

Action: Harvest the entire plant immediately. Once flowering begins, leaves become bitter and tough.

Tiny holes in leaves:

Cause: Flea beetles, which are common on arugula.

Action: Check leaf undersides. Keep plants well-watered so they outgrow damage. Use a lightweight row cover after planting to prevent beetles from landing.

Yellowing leaves:

Cause: Often inconsistent watering or poor drainage.

Action: Check soil moisture and drainage. Soil should stay moist, not soggy.

Quick Tips

- **Succession planting:** Sow a small patch every 2 weeks for a steady supply of tender leaves.
- Spicy vs. mild: Consistent moisture keeps flavor mild; drought stress increases heat.
- **Harvest early:** Pick in the morning when leaves are crispest.

Mini Checklist

- Soil loosened and smoothed
- Seeds planted shallow (¼ inch)
- Soil kept consistently moist (not soggy)
- Seedlings thinned to prevent crowding
- Leaves checked for flea beetle damage
- Outer leaves harvested early for best flavor

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Italian Large Leaf Basil

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun (6-8 hours)	1/4 inch	12–18 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
5–10 Days	60–70 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Productive and rewarding: Once established, basil produces steady harvests of large, fragrant leaves throughout the summer.

Forgiving: Regularly pinching the stems encourages branching, allowing for multiple harvests from a single planting.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 10–12 inches apart.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 5–10 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–3 inches tall
- **First harvest:** 25–30 days (once plants reach 6–8 inches tall)
- **Full maturity:** 60–75 days
- **Cold risk:** Quality drops and plants may be damaged if temperatures fall below 50°F. Basil is killed by frost.

When to Plant

Basil is a “warm-weather crop.” It grows best in heat and does not tolerate cold.

Spring: Plant only after your local last frost date has passed and soil temperatures reach at least 60°F. There is no benefit to planting early—basil dislikes cold soil.

Summer: The main growing season. Basil thrives when temperatures stay consistently warm.

Cold warning: Basil struggles below 50°F and is killed by frost. Even brief cold exposure can cause leaves to turn black.

How to Plant

Either method works, though starting indoors provides an earlier harvest.

Start indoors (recommended): Sow seeds 4–6 weeks before your last frost date in small containers filled with seed-starting mix. Keep soil warm (65–70°F) for best germination. Transplant outdoors only after all frost danger has passed.

Direct sow: Wait until after your last frost date and once soil has warmed. Scatter seeds thinly over prepared soil.

Cover: Sprinkle a light layer of soil over the seeds (about 1/4 inch).

Pat: Gently press the soil so seeds make contact with the soil.

Water: Mist gently to avoid washing seeds away.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Basil needs consistent moisture to remain productive.

If soil feels dry → Water.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Basil prefers moist soil but does not tolerate soggy roots. Avoid letting soil dry out completely, as stress encourages early bolting.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Basil prefers full sun, with at least 6 hours of direct light daily.

In very hot climates (above 90°F), light afternoon shade can help reduce stress.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Usually unnecessary if planted in good soil or compost. Basil does not require heavy feeding.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Pinch-and-Grow Method: For best results, pinch or snip stems just above a set of leaves.

Leave the Base: Do not strip the plant bare. Leave at least 2–3 sets of leaves on each stem so the plant can continue growing.

Pinch Early and Often: Begin harvesting once the plant has several sets of leaves. Regular pinching promotes bushy growth and delays flowering.

Flavor Note: Harvest in the morning, when essential oils are strongest, for the best flavor.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bolting (Flower stalk appears):

What it is: The plant sends up a flower spike as it prepares to go to seed. This often happens during long, hot days or when the plant is stressed.

Action: Pinch off flower buds as soon as they appear. Regular harvesting helps delay bolting. Once flowers fully open, leaf flavor declines.

Blackened leaves:

Cause: Cold damage. Even temperatures in the 40s can trigger this.

Action: Remove damaged leaves and protect plants if cold nights are expected. If frost threatens, harvest the entire plant or bring containers indoors.

Holes in leaves:

Cause: Slugs, Japanese beetles, or other chewing pests.

Action: Check leaf undersides and hand-pick pests. Rinse plants with a gentle spray of water and keep the area clean and weed-free.

Yellowing leaves:

Cause: Often overwatering or poor drainage.

Action: Check soil moisture and drainage. Ensure containers have drainage holes and soil is not staying soggy.

Quick Tips

- Pinching = More Basil: Frequent harvesting leads to bushier, more productive plants.
- **Warm Soil Matters:** Planting too early slows growth and can stunt basil.
- **Harvest Before Frost:** Basil is killed by frost. When cold weather approaches, harvest everything and preserve it by freezing, drying, or making pesto.

Mini Checklist

- Soil is loosened and warm (at least 60°F)
- Seeds planted shallow (1/4 inch)
- Planted after last frost date—basil does not tolerate cold
- Soil kept consistently moist (not soggy)
- Seedlings thinned to prevent overcrowding
- Pinching and harvesting done regularly to encourage bushy growth
- Flower buds removed promptly

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

California Wonder 300 TMR Bell Pepper

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1/4 inch	18–24 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
10–21 Days	70–90+ Days	

Why This Is Easy

Reliable producer: This classic variety has been a home garden favorite since 1928 because it performs well across a wide range of conditions.

Beginner-friendly harvest: Peppers can be picked green or left to ripen red. Both stages are usable and flavorful, so timing does not need to be perfect.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings or space transplants 12–18 inches apart.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 10–21 days (peppers are slow to germinate—keep soil warm and be patient)
- **When to thin/transplant:** When seedlings have 2–3 sets of true leaves
- First harvest (green): 70–75 days from transplant
- Full color (red): 80–90 days from transplant
- **Cold risk:** Peppers are killed by frost and struggle below 50°F. Growth slows noticeably when nights are cool.

When to Plant

Bell peppers are a “warm-weather crop.” They require consistent warmth to grow well.

Spring: Start seeds indoors 8 weeks before your last frost date. Transplant outdoors only after all frost risk has passed and nighttime temperatures stay above 50°F.

Summer: The main growing season. Once established in warm conditions, peppers produce steadily.

Cold warning: Do not rush peppers outdoors. Cold soil and cool nights stunt growth and can set plants back for weeks. Wait until conditions are reliably warm.

How to Plant

Starting indoors is strongly recommended, as peppers need a long, warm season.

Start indoors: Sow seeds 8 weeks before your last frost date. Plant 1/4 inch deep in small containers filled with seed-starting mix. Keep soil warm (80–85°F) for best germination; a heat mat is helpful. Provide bright light once seedlings emerge.

Harden off: Gradually expose seedlings to outdoor conditions over 7–10 days before transplanting.

Transplant: Move plants outdoors when daytime temperatures reach at least 65°F and nights remain above 50°F. Handle roots gently.

Direct sow (only in very warm climates): Wait until soil is consistently warm. Direct sowing is possible but results in a later harvest.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Peppers need steady moisture, especially during flowering and fruiting.

If soil feels dry → Water deeply.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Uneven watering is the most common cause of blossom end rot (dark, sunken spots on the bottom of peppers). Keep moisture consistent.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Peppers prefer full sun, with at least 6–8 hours daily.

In very hot climates (above 90°F), fruit may develop sunscald (papery, bleached patches). Healthy foliage helps shade fruit, so avoid over-pruning leaves.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Peppers are moderate feeders. Compost mixed into the soil at planting is usually sufficient. Avoid excess nitrogen, which promotes leaf growth at the expense of fruit.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Green or Red—Your Choice: California Wonder peppers begin glossy green and turn red if left on the plant longer. Green peppers have a classic bell pepper flavor; red peppers are sweeter.

Pick When Firm: Harvest when peppers feel firm and reach full size (about 4 inches). Use scissors or a knife to cut the stem rather than pulling, which can damage the plant.

Keep Picking: Regular harvesting encourages continued production. Do not leave ripe peppers on the plant for too long.

Flavor Note: Peppers become sweeter the longer they stay on the plant, but harvest before they turn soft or wrinkled.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Blossom End Rot (dark, sunken spot on bottom):

What it is: A calcium uptake issue caused by inconsistent watering, not a disease.

Action: Water more evenly and mulch around plants to help stabilize moisture. Affected peppers are still safe to eat if the damaged portion is removed.

Sunscald (papery, bleached patches on fruit):

Cause: Excessive direct sun on exposed fruit, especially during heat waves.

Action: Maintain healthy foliage to shade fruit. Avoid removing too many leaves. Use shade cloth during extreme heat if needed.

Blossom Drop (flowers fall without setting fruit):

Cause: Temperature stress. Peppers often drop blossoms when nights are below 60°F or days exceed 90°F.

Action: Wait for temperatures to stabilize. Plants usually resume fruiting when conditions improve.

Slow Growth / No Peppers:

Cause: Most often cold temperatures or excess nitrogen fertilizer.

Action: Be patient during cool weather and avoid high-nitrogen feeding.

Aphids or other pests:

Action: Check undersides of leaves regularly. Spray pests off with water and keep the growing area clean and weed-free.

Quick Tips

- **Warmth Is Everything:** Avoid planting too early. Peppers grown in cold soil often never fully recover.
- **Support Heavy Plants:** As fruit develops, plants may become top-heavy. A small stake or cage helps prevent breakage.
- **Harvest Before Frost:** Peppers are killed by frost. When cold weather approaches, harvest all remaining fruit. Even green peppers can ripen indoors on a sunny windowsill.

Mini Checklist

- Seeds started indoors 8 weeks before last frost
- Soil kept warm (80–85°F) during germination
- Seedlings hardened off before transplanting
- Transplanted only after nights stay above 50°F
- Planted in full sun with good drainage
- Soil kept consistently moist (not soggy)
- Harvested regularly to encourage more fruit
- Watched for blossom end rot and watered evenly

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Bok Choy

AT A GLANCE

SUN Full Sun / Partial Shade	PLANTING DEPTH 1/4 to 1/2 inch	SPACING 12 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION 8–14 Days	DAYS TO MATURITY 30–55 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Fast growth: Bok choy grows quickly, making it rewarding for beginners who want to see results fast.

Straightforward in cool weather: The main challenge is bolting (early flowering), which happens when plants are stressed by heat or sudden temperature changes.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** About 1/4 inch (cover lightly)
- Spacing / thinning:
- **Baby leaf:** Thin to 2–4 inches apart
- **Full heads:** Thin to 6–12 inches apart (wider spacing produces larger heads)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** About 7–10 days
- **When to thin:** About 2–3 weeks after sprouting, or once seedlings are a couple of inches tall and sturdy
- First harvest (baby leaves): About 30–35 days
- Full-size harvest (heads): About 45–60 days
- **Bolting risk note:** Young plants exposed to frost or repeated cold nights followed by warm weather may bolt early. Heat and long days can also trigger bolting.

When to Plant

Bok choy is a cool-weather crop, and spring and fall are usually the easiest seasons.

Spring: Plant once the risk of hard freezes is mostly past. Cool weather is fine; sharp temperature swings are the main concern.

Fall: Often the best season. Cooler days help plants stay tender and reduce bolting.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is the simplest approach.

Loosen soil so it drains well.

Place seeds where you want plants to grow, or sow in a short row.

Cover lightly to the proper depth, press gently for good contact, and water carefully.

Optional indoor start: Only if you need a head start. Transplant while seedlings are still young to minimize stress.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Bok choy prefers steady moisture, but not soggy soil.

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry

Sun & Shade If warmer weather arrives, afternoon shade helps reduce bitterness and slow bolting.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Compost mixed into the soil before planting is usually sufficient. If growth later appears pale, lightly top-dress with compost.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

There are two simple harvest options:

Baby leaf style: Snip a few outer leaves from each plant while leaving the center intact.

Full head style: Harvest the entire plant once it looks full and firm. If a tall flower stalk begins to form, harvest immediately—quality declines quickly after bolting.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bolting (tall flower stalk): Harvest right away. For future plantings, aim for cooler weather and provide afternoon shade if needed.

Chewing pests (common on brassicas): Check leaf undersides, hand-pick pests, rinse with a firm spray of water, and use light netting to prevent insects from landing.

Aphids: Look for clusters on new growth and undersides of leaves. Spray off with water and check again regularly.

Yellowing leaves: Check moisture levels and drainage first, then sunlight. Correct basic conditions before adding compost.

Crowding: Thin plants to improve airflow. Crowded plants become stressed more quickly and bolt more easily.

Quick Tips

- Plant during cooler weather for the sweetest leaves.
- As temperatures rise, harvest earlier rather than waiting.
- Harvest outer leaves first to keep the center growing.

Mini Checklist

- Planted during a cool-weather window
- Seeds sown shallow and covered lightly
- Seedlings thinned early to avoid crowding
- Used check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Checked leaf undersides regularly for pests
- Harvested outer leaves or whole plants before bolting

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Waltham Butternut Squash

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1 inch	2–3 feet

DAYS TO GERMINATION	DAYS TO MATURITY
7–14 Days	90–110 Days

Why This Is Easy

Tough and forgiving: Once established, butternut squash vines grow vigorously with minimal attention, and this variety has natural resistance to vine borers.

Big reward for patience: Just a few plants can produce many squash that store well for months, providing homegrown food into winter.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 24–36 inches apart. Rows should be spaced 5–6 feet apart, as vines spread widely.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have 2–3 true leaves
- **First harvest:** 85–100 days
- **Space needed:** Vines can spread 6–10 feet or more
- **Frost note:** Harvest before hard frost. Plants are killed by freezing temperatures.

When to Plant

Butternut squash is a warm-weather, long-season crop. It requires warm soil and a long frost-free period to mature.

Spring: Plant after your last frost date once soil has warmed to at least 65–70°F. Cold soil can cause seeds to rot.

Short-season areas: Start seeds indoors 3–4 weeks before your last frost date, then transplant after frost danger has passed. Handle seedlings gently, as squash roots do not like disturbance.

Fall: Not suited for fall planting. Butternut squash needs the full warm season to mature before frost.

Cold warning: Seeds and young seedlings are very tender. Do not rush planting—wait for reliably warm conditions.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is the simplest option if your growing season is long enough. In shorter seasons, starting indoors works well.

Prepare: Select a sunny location with well-draining soil rich in compost. Butternut squash are heavy feeders.

Sow: Push seeds about 1 inch deep, planting 2–3 seeds per spot spaced 3–4 feet apart.

Cover: Fill soil over seeds and press gently for good contact.

Water: Water thoroughly after planting and keep soil moist, but not soggy, until sprouts appear.

Thin: Once seedlings have 2–3 true leaves, thin to the strongest plant per spot.

If starting indoors: Use biodegradable pots that can be planted directly into the ground to avoid disturbing roots. Transplant after the last frost when nighttime temperatures stay above 50°F.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Squash need steady moisture, especially during flowering and fruit development.

If soil feels dry 1–2 inches down → Water deeply, soaking 8–10 inches into the soil.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Water the soil, not the leaves. Wet foliage encourages fungal issues such as powdery mildew.

Sun & Shade

Butternut squash prefer full sun, with at least 6–8 hours daily.

Plants tolerate summer heat well and benefit from ample space to sprawl.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Work compost into the soil before planting. Side-dress with compost or a balanced fertilizer when vines begin to run and again when fruit starts to form.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Wait for Full Maturity: Unlike summer squash, butternut squash must fully ripen on the vine. Harvest when:

Skin turns deep tan or beige

Skin is hard and cannot be dented with a fingernail

Stem appears dry and corky

Cut, Don’t Pull: Use a sharp knife or pruners and leave about 2 inches of stem attached. Broken stems increase the risk of rot during storage.

Timing: Harvest before hard frost. Light frost usually does not harm the fruit, but freezing temperatures will.

Cure for Storage: After harvest, cure squash in a warm, dry place for 7–10 days. This hardens the skin and improves flavor. Store cured squash in a cool, dark area (around 50–55°F) for up to 3 months or longer.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

Cause: Soil was too cold or too wet, causing seeds to rot.

Action: Wait for soil temperatures of at least 65–70°F and avoid overwatering before emergence.

Flowers but no fruit (poor pollination):

Cause: Squash produce separate male and female flowers, with males appearing first. Limited pollinator activity can delay fruit set.

Action: Allow time for female flowers to appear, usually about a week later. If needed, hand-pollinate by transferring pollen from a male flower to the center of a female flower.

Wilting vines (possible vine borer):

Cause: Squash vine borers tunnel into stems, causing sudden wilting. Sawdust-like debris near the stem base is a common sign.

Action: Although Waltham Butternut has some resistance, inspect stems regularly. If detected early, remove the borer and bury the damaged section to encourage re-rooting. Remove and destroy affected plants at the end of the season.

White powder on leaves (powdery mildew):

Cause: A common fungal disease, especially in humid conditions or when leaves stay wet.

Action: Water at the base of plants, improve air circulation, and remove heavily affected leaves. Late-season mildew often has little impact if fruit is nearly mature.

Squash bugs:

Cause: Gray-brown insects that weaken plants by feeding on sap.

Action: Check undersides of leaves for bronze-colored egg clusters. Crush eggs and hand-pick adults. Keep the area free of debris where bugs hide.

Quick Tips

- **Give Them Room:** Vines can spread 6–10 feet or more. Avoid crowding.
- **Cure Before Storing:** Proper curing improves flavor and storage life.
- **Leave the Stem On:** Keeping a 2-inch stem helps prevent rot in storage.
- **Harvest Before Hard Frost:** Light frost is tolerable, but hard frost damages fruit.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost once soil reached 65–70°F
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep
- Seedlings thinned to one strong plant per spot
- Soil kept moist but not soggy, watered at the base
- Compost added at planting and mid-season
- Pollination observed (male flowers first, then female)
- Harvested when skin turned tan and hard, before hard frost
- Left about 2 inches of stem attached
- Cured in a warm, dry place for 7–10 days before storage

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Cilantro / Coriander

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun / Partial Shade	1/4 to 1/2 inch	4–6 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
7–14 Days	50–100 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Two harvests from one plant: You can harvest fresh cilantro leaves first, then allow the plant to flower and collect coriander seeds later—two flavors from a single planting.

Cool-weather friendly: Cilantro grows best in spring and fall, when many other herbs slow down, and it tolerates light frost.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 to 1/2 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 2–4 inches apart for leaf harvest, or 6–8 inches apart if growing primarily for seed.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (up to 21 days in cooler soil)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–3 inches tall
- **First leaf harvest:** 3–4 weeks after sprouting, once plants reach about 6 inches tall
- Seed harvest (coriander): About 90–100 days from planting, after flowers fade and seeds turn brown
- **Bolting note:** Cilantro flowers and goes to seed quickly in heat. This is normal and expected.

When to Plant

Cilantro is a cool-weather herb that performs best in spring and fall.

Spring: Plant as soon as the soil can be worked, about 2–3 weeks before your last frost date. Cilantro tolerates light frost.

Summer: Not ideal. Temperatures above 75–80°F trigger rapid bolting. Summer plantings usually give only a short leaf harvest before flowering.

Fall: An excellent planting window. Cooler temperatures extend leaf production. Plant 6–8 weeks before your first frost.

Succession planting: For a steady supply of leaves, sow new seeds every 2–3 weeks during spring and again in fall.

How to Plant

Direct sowing works best, as cilantro has a taproot and does not transplant well.

Prepare: Choose a location with full sun to part shade. In warmer climates, afternoon shade helps slow bolting. Loosen soil and mix in compost.

Optional seed prep: Cilantro “seeds” are actually two seeds joined together. Gently crushing the husk and soaking seeds for 24 hours can speed germination.

Sow: Plant seeds 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep, spaced about 1–2 inches apart.

Cover: Fill soil over seeds and press gently. Seeds need darkness to germinate.

Water: Water gently after planting and keep soil moist, not soggy, until sprouts appear.

Rows: Space rows 12–15 inches apart.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Cilantro prefers consistent moisture but does not like soggy soil.

If soil feels dry → Water.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Mulching around plants helps keep soil cool and moist, which can delay bolting.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Full sun works well in cool weather.

In warmer conditions, afternoon shade helps extend the leaf harvest.

When temperatures rise above 75–80°F, bolting is expected. Flowers are useful for pollinators, and seeds can be harvested later.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Cilantro is a light feeder. A small amount of balanced fertilizer once or twice during the season is sufficient. Avoid overfeeding, which can reduce flavor.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Leaves (Cilantro):

Begin harvesting when plants reach about 6 inches tall.

Cut the top 2–3 inches of stems to encourage bushier growth and delay bolting.

Harvest regularly. Younger leaves have the best flavor.

Once a thick central stalk forms and leaves become feathery, bolting has begun and leaf quality declines.

Seeds (Coriander):

Allow plants to flower. Small white or pale pink blooms will appear.

After flowers fade, green seeds form and gradually turn light brown.

Cut seed heads and place them upside down in a paper bag to dry for 1–2 weeks. Seeds will fall into the bag as they dry.

Store dried seeds in a sealed container for cooking or replanting.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bolting too fast:

Cause: Heat, long days, or transplant stress.

Action: This is normal for cilantro. Plant during cooler seasons, provide afternoon shade, keep soil cool with mulch, and use succession planting for continued harvest.

Seeds didn't sprout:

Cause: Seeds planted too deep, soil drying out, or old seed.

Action: Plant only 1/4–1/2 inch deep and keep soil evenly moist. Soaking seeds before planting can help speed germination.

Yellowing leaves or sticky residue (aphids):

Cause: Aphids feeding on stems and leaf undersides.

Action: Rinse off with a strong spray of water and remove heavily affected leaves.

Powdery white spots on leaves:

Cause: Powdery mildew, favored by humidity and poor airflow.

Action: Thin plants for better air circulation, water at the soil level, and remove affected leaves.

Leaf spots (brown or black):

Cause: Bacterial leaf spot, often associated with wet conditions or overhead watering.

Action: Remove infected plants and avoid wetting leaves. Rotate crops the following year.

Quick Tips

- Direct sow only—cilantro does not transplant well.
- Use succession planting every 2–3 weeks for a steady leaf supply.
- Bolting is part of the plant's life cycle. Let it flower and harvest coriander seeds.
- Mulch helps keep soil cool and extend leaf production in warm weather.

Mini Checklist

- Planted during cool weather (spring or fall)
- Seeds planted 1/4–1/2 inch deep
- Soil kept moist until seedlings emerged
- Seedlings thinned to 2–4 inches apart
- Leaves harvested once plants reached 6 inches tall
- Top growth cut to encourage bushier plants
- Watched for bolting as temperatures warmed
- Allowed some plants to flower for coriander seed harvest

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

National Pickling Cucumber

AT A GLANCE

SUN
Full Sun (8+ hours)

PLANTING DEPTH
1/2 to 1 inch

SPACING
12 inches / 3 feet

DAYS TO GERMINATION
5–10 Days

DAYS TO MATURITY
50–60 Days

Why This Is Easy

Prolific producer: This classic variety produces cucumbers steadily throughout the season, providing plenty for fresh eating, salads, and pickling.

Flexible harvest: Cucumbers can be harvested small (2–3 inches) for gherkins, medium (4–5 inches) for spears, or full size (5–6 inches) for slicing. There is no single “right” harvest moment.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/2 to 1 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 12–18 inches apart. Space rows 4–6 feet apart to allow for spreading vines.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 3–10 days (faster in warm soil, slower in cool conditions)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have 2–3 true leaves
- **First harvest:** 50–60 days
- **Harvest window:** Several weeks of continuous picking with regular harvesting
- **Frost note:** Cucumbers are frost-tender and must be planted after all frost risk has passed.

When to Plant

Cucumbers are a warm-weather crop that require warm soil and air to grow well.

Spring: Plant only after your last frost date and once soil temperatures reach at least 65–70°F. Cold soil leads to weak growth and poor germination.

Summer: The main growing season. Cucumbers thrive in warm conditions.

Fall: Generally not suitable for fall planting, as cucumbers need warm weather for their entire growing cycle.

Cold warning: Cucumbers cannot tolerate frost. Do not rush planting—wait for consistently warm weather.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is recommended, as cucumbers have sensitive roots and do not transplant easily.

Prepare: Select a sunny location with well-draining soil and work in compost, as cucumbers are heavy feeders.

Sow: Plant seeds 1/2 to 1 inch deep, spacing them 6–8 inches apart initially.

Cover: Fill soil over seeds and press gently for good contact.

Water: Water thoroughly after planting and keep soil moist until sprouts appear, but avoid overwatering, which can cause seeds to rot.

Thin: Once seedlings have 2–3 true leaves, thin to 12–18 inches apart, keeping the strongest plants.

If starting indoors: Start seeds 3–4 weeks before your last frost in biodegradable pots that can be planted directly into the soil. Transplant when seedlings have 1–2 true leaves and handle roots gently.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Cucumbers need consistent, generous moisture, especially during flowering and fruiting.

If soil feels dry → Water deeply (about 1–2 inches per week).

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Water at the base of plants rather than overhead. Wet foliage increases disease risk.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Full sun is essential, with at least 6–8 hours daily.

Cucumbers grow best between 70–85°F and struggle below 60°F.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Cucumbers are heavy feeders. Side-dress with compost or a balanced fertilizer when vines begin to run and again when flowers appear.

Trellising (optional but helpful): Training vines on a trellis saves space, improves airflow, keeps fruit clean, and simplifies harvesting. If grown on the ground, mulch beneath vines.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Check Daily: Once production begins, inspect plants every 1–2 days. Cucumbers grow quickly.

Size guide:

2–3 inches: Ideal for gherkin-style pickles

4–5 inches: Well suited for spears or fresh eating

5–6 inches: Full size for slicing

Don’t Wait Too Long: Overripe cucumbers become yellow, seedy, and bitter and signal the plant to stop producing.

Cut, Don’t Pull: Use scissors or a knife to cut fruit from the vine to avoid damaging plants.

Keep Picking: Frequent harvesting encourages continued production.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

Cause: Soil was too cold or too wet.

Action: Wait until soil reaches 65–70°F and avoid overwatering before emergence.

Flowers but no fruit (poor pollination):

Cause: Male flowers appear first, which is normal. Lack of pollinators can delay fruit set.

Action: Be patient for female flowers to appear. If needed, hand-pollinate by transferring pollen from male to female flowers. Avoid pesticides that harm bees.

Bitter cucumbers:

Cause: Stress from heat, drought, or uneven watering.

Action: Water consistently, mulch to keep soil cool, and harvest promptly. Bitterness is strongest near the stem end.

Cucumber beetles:

Cause: Common pests that damage foliage and spread bacterial wilt.

Action: Use row covers early, hand-pick beetles, and keep the garden clean of debris.

Wilting vines (bacterial wilt):

Cause: Disease spread by cucumber beetles.

Action: Remove and destroy infected plants promptly and focus on beetle control.

White powder on leaves (powdery mildew):

Cause: Fungal disease favored by humidity and poor airflow.

Action: Space plants properly, water at the base, remove affected leaves, and use trellising to improve air circulation.

Quick Tips

- Direct sow for best results—cucumbers do not transplant well.
- Plant only in warm soil (65–70°F minimum).
- Harvest frequently once production begins.
- Use a trellis when possible to improve plant health and ease harvesting.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost with soil at 65–70°F
- Seeds planted 1/2–1 inch deep
- Seedlings thinned to 12–18 inches apart
- Soil kept consistently moist, watered at the base
- Compost or fertilizer applied when vines began running
- Plants checked every 1–2 days during harvest
- Cucumbers harvested before becoming oversized or yellow
- Plants monitored regularly for cucumber beetles

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Mammoth Long Island Dill

AT A GLANCE

SUN Full Sun (6–8 hours)	PLANTING DEPTH 1/4 inch	SPACING 12–18 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION 7–14 Days	DAYS TO MATURITY 40–90 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Fast and forgiving: Dill grows quickly with minimal care. Direct sow, water as needed, and harvest—an excellent herb for beginners.

Double harvest: You can enjoy fresh, feathery leaves first, then allow plants to flower and collect seeds for pickling and seasoning, all from the same planting.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch (dill seeds need some light to germinate, so avoid planting too deep)
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 6–12 inches apart.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 10–21 days (germination can be slow—be patient)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–3 inches tall
- **First leaf harvest:** 40–50 days, once plants reach 6–8 inches tall
- **Seed harvest:** 70–90 days, after flowers fade and seeds turn brown
- **Bolting note:** Dill flowers quickly in hot weather. This is normal—harvest leaves early, then allow the plant to set seed.

When to Plant

Dill is a cool-weather herb that bolts in heat and performs best in spring and fall.

Spring: Plant after the last frost once soil has warmed to at least 60°F. This is the primary planting window.

Summer: Dill bolts quickly in hot weather. Summer plantings usually provide a short leaf harvest before flowering.

Fall: In mild climates, plant in late summer for a fall harvest. Dill tolerates light frost.

Succession planting: For a steady supply of fresh leaves, sow new seeds every 2–3 weeks through spring and into early summer.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is strongly recommended, as dill has a taproot and does not transplant well.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location with well-draining soil. Dill is adaptable but benefits from compost mixed into the soil.

Sow: Scatter seeds about 1 inch apart and cover with approximately 1/4 inch of soil. Do not bury seeds deeply.

Water: Water gently after planting and keep soil moist, not soggy, until sprouts appear.

Thin: When seedlings reach 2–3 inches tall, thin to 6–12 inches apart. Crowded plants are more prone to disease.

Rows: Space rows 12–18 inches apart.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Dill prefers consistent moisture but does not tolerate wet soil.

If soil feels dry → Water deeply.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Once established, dill is fairly drought-tolerant. Allow soil to dry slightly between waterings rather than overwatering.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Full sun (6–8 hours daily) is ideal.

In hot climates, light afternoon shade can help delay bolting.

When temperatures remain above 75–80°F, bolting is expected. Flowers can be enjoyed and seeds harvested.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Dill requires minimal fertilization. One or two light feedings during the season are sufficient. Excess fertilizer can reduce flavor.

Staking (if needed): Mammoth Long Island dill can reach 3–5 feet tall. In windy areas, provide support with stakes or plant near a fence.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Leaves (Dill Weed):

Begin harvesting when plants are 6–8 inches tall.

Snip leaves as needed. Flavor is best before flowering.

Regular harvesting encourages bushier growth and can delay bolting.

Once a thick central stalk forms and flowering begins, leaf quality declines.

Flowers:

Dill flowers are edible and commonly used in pickling.

Yellow flower clusters attract beneficial insects.

Seeds:

Allow plants to flower fully. After blooms fade, green seeds will form.

Wait until seeds turn brown.

Cut seed heads and place them upside down in a paper bag to dry for 1–2 weeks. Seeds will drop into the bag as they dry.

Store dried seeds in a sealed container for cooking, pickling, or replanting.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

Cause: Seeds planted too deep, soil dried out, or old seed.

Action: Plant only 1/4 inch deep and keep soil consistently moist. Germination can take up to 3 weeks.

Bolting too fast:

Cause: Heat stress or long days.

Action: This is normal. Plant early in spring or again in fall. Use succession planting and harvest leaves early. Allow bolted plants to flower and set seed.

Aphids:

Cause: Aphids cluster on stems and leaves.

Action: Dill flowers attract ladybugs that often control aphids naturally. If needed, spray aphids off with water or use insecticidal soap.

Caterpillars (parsleyworms/swallowtail larvae):

Cause: Black swallowtail butterflies lay eggs on dill.

Action: These caterpillars become butterflies. If possible, leave them undisturbed. Otherwise, hand-pick and relocate. Planting extra dill helps share the crop.

Powdery mildew:

Cause: Fungal disease encouraged by humidity and poor air circulation.

Action: Thin plants for airflow, water at the soil level, and remove affected leaves.

Plants falling over:

Cause: Tall growth combined with wind or rain.

Action: Stake plants or grow them near a fence. Choose a sheltered location when possible.

Quick Tips

- Direct sow only—dill does not transplant well.
- Succession plant every 2–3 weeks for continuous leaf harvest.
- Plant seeds shallowly, as light aids germination.
- Bolting is part of the life cycle—use flowers and seeds rather than viewing it as a failure.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost once soil reached 60°F
- Seeds planted 1/4 inch deep
- Soil kept moist until seedlings emerged
- Seedlings thinned to 6–12 inches apart
- Leaves harvested once plants reached 6 inches tall
- Regular cutting done to delay bolting
- Tall plants staked if needed
- Some plants allowed to flower for seed harvest

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Jalapeño Pepper

AT A GLANCE

SUN Full Sun (8+ hours)	PLANTING DEPTH 1/4 inch	SPACING 12–18 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION 10–21 Days	DAYS TO MATURITY 70–85 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Productive plant: A single jalapeño plant can produce dozens of peppers over the season, so even a small planting goes a long way.

Compact and forgiving: Jalapeños tolerate minor watering inconsistencies better than many vegetables, and their bushy size works well in small gardens or containers.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch
- **Spacing:** 14–24 inches apart (plants grow about 2 feet tall and roughly 18 inches wide)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 10–21 days (peppers require warmth, so germination can be slow)
- **When to transplant outdoors:** After all frost risk has passed and nighttime temperatures stay above 55–60°F
- **First harvest:** 70–90 days from transplant (longer if starting directly from seed)
- **Harvest window:** Continuous production for 30–45 days or more once fruiting begins

When to Plant

Jalapeños are warm-weather plants with no frost tolerance and require consistent heat.

Start indoors: Sow seeds 8–10 weeks before your last expected frost. Seeds germinate best at 75–85°F.

Transplant outdoors: Move plants outside 1–2 weeks after your last frost date, once soil reaches about 65°F and nights remain above 55–60°F.

Direct sowing outdoors: Only recommended in very warm climates with a long growing season.

Beginner option: Purchasing nursery transplants is a common and reliable shortcut that saves time and effort.

How to Plant

Starting Indoors (Recommended)

Fill containers with seed-starting mix, which is lighter than regular potting soil.

Sow seeds 1/4 inch deep, placing 2–3 seeds per cell and thinning later.

Provide warmth (75–85°F) using a heat mat or warm location.

Once sprouted, give seedlings 14–16 hours of bright light daily.

Harden off seedlings about 10 days before transplanting by gradually exposing them to outdoor conditions.

Transplant once nighttime temperatures consistently stay above 55–60°F, spacing plants 14–24 inches apart.

Direct Sowing (Warm Climates Only)

Wait until soil temperature reaches at least 65°F.

Sow seeds 1/4 inch deep, spaced 14–16 inches apart.

Keep soil moist until seedlings emerge.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Jalapeños prefer steady moisture but do not tolerate soggy soil.

If soil feels dry 1–2 inches down → Water deeply at the base.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Large swings between dry and wet soil can lead to blossom end rot and misshapen fruit.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Full sun (8–10 hours daily) supports the best growth and yields.

Jalapeños handle heat well up to about 90°F.

Below 55°F or above 95°F, plants may pause flowering and fruit set.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Jalapeños are moderate feeders.

Mix compost into the soil at planting.

Once flowering begins, feed every 4–6 weeks with a balanced or pepper-specific fertilizer.

Avoid excess nitrogen, which encourages leaf growth over fruit.

Support (if needed): Plants heavy with fruit may benefit from staking or a small cage.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

When to Pick

Green jalapeños: Harvest at 3–4 inches long, when fruit is dark green, firm, and glossy.

Red jalapeños: Leave fruit on the plant longer to ripen fully. Red peppers are sweeter and slightly hotter.

How to Harvest

Use scissors or pruning shears to cut peppers from the plant, leaving a short stem.

Avoid pulling or twisting, which can damage branches.

Gloves are helpful when harvesting large quantities.

Keep Harvesting

Regular picking encourages continued flowering and fruit production. Avoid leaving mature peppers on the plant too long.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn't sprout:

Cause: Soil temperature too low.

Action: Provide steady warmth (75–85°F) and allow up to three weeks for germination.

Flowers dropping without fruit:

Cause: Temperature stress from cool nights or extreme heat.

Action: Wait for conditions to stabilize; fruit set usually resumes naturally.

Blossom end rot:

Cause: Inconsistent watering affecting calcium uptake.

Action: Maintain even moisture. Remove affected fruit; later peppers are often unaffected.

Aphids:

Cause: Sap-feeding insects on new growth.

Action: Spray off with water, encourage beneficial insects, or use insecticidal soap if needed.

Lots of leaves but no peppers:

Cause: Excess nitrogen.

Action: Switch to a balanced or lower-nitrogen fertilizer once flowering begins.

Slow growth or yellowing leaves:

Cause: Cool conditions, nutrient imbalance, or poor drainage.

Action: Ensure warmth, good drainage, and appropriate feeding.

Quick Tips

- Starting indoors or using transplants provides a strong head start.
- Wait for warm soil and nights before planting outdoors.
- Harvest frequently to keep plants productive.
- Handle peppers carefully—capsaicin can irritate skin and eyes.

Mini Checklist

- Seeds started indoors 8–10 weeks before last frost (or transplants purchased)
- Warmth provided for germination (75–85°F)
- Transplanted after frost risk passed and nights stayed above 55–60°F
- Plants spaced 14–24 inches apart in full sun
- Soil kept evenly moist and well-draining
- Feeding started once flowering began
- Peppers harvested regularly at desired size
- Fruit cut with scissors rather than pulled

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Kale

AT A GLANCE

SUN Full Sun / Partial Shade	PLANTING DEPTH 1/4 to 1/2 inch	SPACING 12 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION 10–20 Days	DAYS TO MATURITY 25–50 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Very forgiving: Kale handles cool weather well and continues growing even when conditions are less than perfect.

Long harvest window: You don't harvest once and stop—kale allows repeated picking over time.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4–1/2 inch
- **Spacing / thinning:** Thin plants to 12–18 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 5–10 days after planting
- **When to thin:** About 2–3 weeks after sprouting, once seedlings have a few true leaves
- **First harvest:** Baby leaves around 25–30 days; mature leaves later
- **Ongoing harvest:** Full plants are usually ready around 50–65 days and will continue producing with proper harvesting
- **Cold tolerance:** Kale tolerates temperatures down to about 20°F and often develops better flavor after cold exposure

When to Plant

Kale is a cool-weather crop that performs best in mild temperatures and struggles in sustained heat.

Spring: Sow seeds as soon as the soil can be worked and the risk of hard freezes is passing. Kale tolerates cool nights and light frost.

Fall: Sow seeds in late summer so plants establish before cold weather. Kale is one of the last vegetables to keep producing as temperatures drop and can continue well into cooler conditions.

How to Plant

Kale can be direct sown or started indoors, and both methods work well for beginners.

Direct sowing: Plant seeds at the proper depth, cover lightly with soil, and keep the soil lightly moist until sprouts appear. Thin seedlings once they are established so plants have room to grow.

Starting indoors: Sow seeds in small containers with seed-starting mix. Keep soil lightly moist and provide bright light. Transplant outdoors once plants are sturdy and outdoor conditions are cool and comfortable.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Watering: Check the soil before watering.

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry

Moisture balance: Kale prefers consistent moisture but does not tolerate sitting in wet soil.

Sun & Shade

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Compost-rich soil is usually sufficient. Kale is not a heavy feeder when soil quality is good.

Mulch (optional): A light mulch helps maintain even moisture and keeps roots comfortable.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Harvest kale by picking outer leaves first and leaving the center growing point intact. This allows the plant to continue producing new leaves. Harvest regularly once leaves reach a usable size. Frequent picking supports steady growth and helps prevent leaves from becoming overly tough. Kale often develops a sweeter, milder flavor after exposure to cooler weather.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Holes in leaves: Chewing pests are common. Check undersides of leaves, hand-pick pests, rinse plants with water, or use a light garden cover or netting.

Yellowing leaves: Check moisture, drainage, and sun exposure first. Address these basics before adding fertilizer.

Tough or bitter leaves: Harvest younger leaves, maintain steady moisture, and avoid long gaps between harvests.

Crowding: Thin plants properly so air can circulate, reducing stress and disease risk.

Quick Tips

- Start harvesting once leaves are large enough to use—no need to wait for perfection.
- Always harvest outer leaves and leave the center growing.
- Cooler weather usually improves flavor.
- Regular harvesting keeps plants productive longer.

Mini Checklist

- Seeds planted at the correct depth
- Seedlings thinned to proper spacing
- Soil moisture checked before watering
- Soil kept moist but not soggy
- Outer leaves harvested regularly
- Plants monitored for chewing pests
- Plants kept uncrowded for airflow

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Parsley – Triple Curled

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun / Partial Shade	1/8 to 1/4 inch	8–12 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
14–28 Days	70–80 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Cut-and-come-again herb: Harvest outer leaves and the plant continues producing, giving you fresh parsley all season from a single planting.

Cool-weather tolerant and shade-friendly: Parsley performs well in conditions that challenge many other herbs, making it a forgiving choice for beginners.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch (cover lightly—darkness supports germination)
- **Spacing:** Thin plants to 6–10 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 14–28 days (parsley is famously slow to germinate—patience is important)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–3 inches tall
- **First harvest:** 70–75 days, or once plants have 8–10 leaves
- **Ongoing harvest:** All season long; parsley is a biennial but typically grown as an annual

When to Plant

Parsley prefers cool weather and tolerates light frost.

Spring: Sow seeds 2–4 weeks before your last frost date, as soon as soil can be worked. Soil temperatures of 50–70°F support germination, with 65–75°F being ideal.

Fall: In mild climates, plant in late summer for fall and winter harvest.

Indoor start: Start seeds indoors 6–8 weeks before the last frost to offset slow germination.

Succession planting: Sow new seeds every 3–4 weeks for a steady supply of fresh parsley.

How to Plant

Parsley can be direct sown or started indoors. Slow sprouting is normal, so patience matters.

Speeding Up Germination (Optional but Helpful) Parsley seeds have a hard coat that delays germination. To speed the process:

Soak seeds in warm water for 12–24 hours before planting, or

Freeze seeds for 3–5 days, then soak in warm water for a few hours. Either method softens the seed coat and can noticeably reduce germination time.

Direct Sowing

Prepare: Choose a site with full sun to partial shade (at least 6 hours of sun). Work compost into well-draining soil.

Sow: Plant seeds 1/4 inch deep, spacing them about 1–2 inches apart. Cover lightly —parsley germinates best in darkness.

Water: Keep soil consistently moist, but not soggy, until sprouts appear. Drying out during this period can prevent germination.

Mark rows: Seedlings emerge slowly and look grass-like at first. Marking rows helps avoid accidental disturbance.

Thin: Once seedlings reach 2–3 inches tall, thin to 6–10 inches apart.

Starting Indoors

Sow seeds 6–8 weeks before the last frost.

Plant 1/4 inch deep in seed-starting mix and keep temperatures around 65–75°F.

Keep soil evenly moist and expect sprouts in 2–4 weeks.

Harden off seedlings and transplant outdoors, spacing 6–10 inches apart.

Container Growing

Parsley grows well in containers. Use a pot at least 6–8 inches deep with drainage holes.

Place containers in a sunny window or on a patio.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Parsley has shallow roots and needs consistent moisture.

If the soil surface feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

Tip: Mulch helps retain moisture and suppress weeds. Avoid letting parsley dry out completely, as it does not recover well from drought stress.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Temperature:

Full sun (6–8 hours) is ideal, though parsley tolerates partial shade, especially in hot climates.

Best growth occurs at 50–70°F, and plants tolerate light frost.

In very hot weather, afternoon shade helps reduce stress and delay bolting.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Parsley benefits from fertile soil. Feed once or twice during the season with a balanced fertilizer or liquid feed. Pale or yellowing leaves may indicate a need for nitrogen.

Weeding: Keep the area weed-free, as parsley's shallow roots do not compete well. Weed carefully to avoid root disturbance.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

When to Harvest

Begin harvesting once plants have at least 8–10 leaves and are 6 inches or taller.

Always harvest from the outside first, leaving the center growth intact.

How to Harvest

Cut stems at the base of the plant, near soil level, rather than trimming leaf tips. This encourages fuller regrowth.

Remove no more than one-third of the plant at a time to allow recovery.

Harvest every 2–3 weeks to promote steady growth and help prevent bolting.

Flavor Note Young leaves are milder, while mature leaves have a stronger flavor. Triple Curled parsley is generally milder than flat-leaf Italian types.

Storage

Fresh: Store stems in a glass of water in the refrigerator or wrap them in a damp paper towel.

Freeze: Chop and freeze in ice cube trays with water or oil for long-term storage.

Drying: Parsley can be dried, but much of its flavor is lost; freezing preserves taste better.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout or took a long time:

Cause: Normal slow germination, dried-out soil, or cool temperatures.

Action: Keep soil consistently moist and be patient. Pre-soaking seeds and using fresh seed can improve results.

Weak or leggy seedlings:

Cause: Insufficient light.

Action: Provide at least 6 hours of direct sun or supplemental lighting, and thin crowded seedlings.

Yellowing leaves:

Cause: Overwatering, drought stress, or nutrient deficiency.

Action: Check moisture levels and drainage first. Feed lightly if soil nutrients are low.

Bolting:

Cause: Heat stress or natural second-year flowering habit.

Action: Remove flower stalks promptly during the first year to extend leaf harvest. In hot climates, provide partial shade. Once heavy bolting begins, quality declines and plants are best replaced.

Aphids:

Cause: Common sap-feeding insects.

Action: Spray plants with water or use insecticidal soap if infestations are heavy.

Caterpillars (parsley worms):

Cause: Black swallowtail larvae feeding on leaves.

Action: These develop into butterflies. Share plants if possible, or hand-pick and relocate. Planting extra parsley can help accommodate them.

Quick Tips

- Pre-soak seeds to speed slow germination.
- Expect a 2–4 week sprout window and remain patient.
- Harvest outer stems first to keep plants productive.
- Label rows to avoid disturbing slow-emerging seedlings.

Mini Checklist

- Seeds pre-soaked for 12–24 hours (optional)
- Planted 1/4 inch deep in full sun to partial shade
- Soil kept consistently moist until sprouts appeared
- Seedlings thinned to 6–10 inches apart
- Outer stems harvested first, center left intact
- Stems cut at the base rather than leaf tips
- Flower stalks removed promptly if bolting begins

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Spinach

AT A GLANCE

SUN Full Sun / Partial Shade	PLANTING DEPTH 1/2 inch	SPACING 4–6 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION 7–14 Days	DAYS TO MATURITY 25–50 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Fast reward: You can start harvesting baby leaves in under a month.

Cool-weather champion: Spinach thrives in the chilly days of spring and fall, when many other crops struggle.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** ½ inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 3–6 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (may be slower in very cold soil)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 1–2 inches tall
- **Baby leaf harvest:** 20–30 days
- **Mature leaf harvest:** 40–50 days
- **Heat risk:** Plants will likely bolt (go to seed) and turn bitter if temperatures stay above 75–80°F

When to Plant

Spinach is a strict cool-weather crop.

Spring: Plant 4–6 weeks before the last frost. Spinach tolerates cold snaps well.

Fall: Plant in late summer to early fall as temperatures begin to cool.

Summer warning: Avoid planting in summer heat. Warm soil prevents good germination, and plants bolt quickly.

How to Plant

Direct sowing works best. Spinach has a taproot that prefers not to be disturbed.

Prepare: Loosen soil about 6 inches deep and mix in compost.

Sow: Place seeds in a row.

Cover: Bury seeds to about fingernail depth (½ inch). Spinach needs darkness and cool soil to germinate.

Water: Water gently but thoroughly.

Optional: Starting indoors is possible, but transplanting risks root damage. Direct sowing is more reliable.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering keeps spinach crisp and productive.

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

Tip: Dry soil stresses plants and triggers early bolting.

Sun & Shade

Cool spring and fall: Full sun works well.

Warming weather: Partial shade helps extend harvest. The shade of taller plants can buy extra time if spring heats up quickly.

Feeding (if applicable)

Spinach responds well to nitrogen. If leaves look pale rather than deep green, apply a light feeding of fish emulsion or compost tea.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Outer leaves first: Pick the largest outer leaves and leave the center growing point intact.

Don’t strip the plant: Always leave at least one-third of the leaves so the plant can regrow.

Harvest early in heat: If a heatwave is forecast, harvest the whole plant. Spinach does not recover once high heat arrives.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Poor germination:

Cause: Soil is too warm. Spinach seeds go dormant in heat.

Fix: Wait for cooler conditions, or shade the soil briefly before planting to lower temperature.

Bolting (tall center stalk):

Signs: Arrow-shaped leaves and a central flower stalk. Flavor turns bitter.

Fix: Harvest immediately. Bolting cannot be reversed.

Yellowing leaves:

Cause: Often soggy soil or nitrogen deficiency.

Fix: Check drainage first. If soil is not waterlogged, add a gentle nitrogen feed.

Leaf damage (tunnels or holes):

Cause: Leaf miners or aphids.

Fix: Inspect undersides of leaves. Crush miner trails or rinse aphids off with water. Use light row cover at planting to prevent pests.

Quick Tips

- **Refrigerator trick:** For late-summer planting, chill seed packets in the fridge for about a week before sowing to improve germination.
- **Succession planting:** Sow a short row every 2 weeks in spring for steady harvests.
- **Freeze extras:** Blanch leaves for 1 minute and freeze for later use.

Mini Checklist

- Soil is cool and loosened
- Seeds planted ½ inch deep
- Soil kept consistently moist
- Seedlings thinned to avoid crowding
- Outer leaves harvested regularly
- Bolting watched for as temperatures rise

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Tomato – Large Red Cherry

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	DAYS TO MATURITY
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1/4 inch	65–75 Days

Why This Is Easy

Prolific producer: This variety pumps out clusters of sweet, bite-sized tomatoes all summer long. One or two plants can supply a steady harvest.

Adaptable grower: Large Red Cherry tomatoes perform well in garden beds, raised beds, or large patio containers.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch (for starting seed indoors)
- **Spacing:** 18–24 inches apart
- **Container growing:** Use at least a 5-gallon pot per plant

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin/transplant:** When seedlings are 3–4 inches tall and have their first true (jagged) leaves
- **First harvest:** About 70–80 days after transplanting
- **Ongoing harvest:** Once production begins, plants continue producing until the first fall frost

When to Plant

Tomatoes are warm-weather crops with no frost tolerance.

Spring: Transplant outdoors only after all danger of frost has passed and nighttime temperatures stay consistently above 50°F.

Summer: Peak growing and ripening season—tomatoes love heat.

Cold warning: A single frost will kill tomato plants. If frost threatens in fall, harvest all remaining fruit (even green tomatoes).

How to Plant

Starting indoors is strongly recommended.

Start indoors: Sow seeds 6–8 weeks before your last frost date. Provide bright light from a sunny window or grow lights.

Transplant deeply: When planting outdoors, bury the stem deeper than it was in the pot—up to the first set of leaves. Roots will form along the buried stem, creating a stronger plant.

Watering: Water well right after transplanting to settle the soil around the roots.

Support: Large Red Cherry tomatoes are indeterminate (vining). Install a tomato cage or sturdy stake at planting time to avoid disturbing roots later.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry 1 inch down → water deeply at the base

If damp → wait

Tip: Keep water off the leaves whenever possible. Watering at the soil level helps prevent diseases like blight.

Sun & Shade

Full sun: At least 6–8 hours of direct sunlight daily

Airflow: Space plants properly so air can move freely and reduce disease pressure

Feeding (if applicable)

Compost mixed into the soil at planting is usually enough.

Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers later in the season—they promote leafy growth at the expense of fruit.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

When to pick: Harvest when tomatoes are fully red and detach easily from the vine with a gentle twist.

Pick often: Regular harvesting encourages more fruit production and reduces pest problems.

End of season: If frost is coming, pick all fruit. Green tomatoes will ripen indoors on a sunny windowsill or inside a paper bag.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Cracked fruit:

Cause: Sudden heavy watering after a dry period

Fix: Keep soil moisture steady using check-first watering

Yellowing lower leaves:

Cause: Often natural aging or a common soil fungus

Action: Remove yellow leaves to improve airflow. If yellowing spreads quickly, check drainage.

Large green caterpillars (hornworms):

Action: Look for missing leaves and dark droppings. Hand-pick caterpillars and remove them from the garden.

Quick Tips

- Don’t refrigerate: Homegrown tomatoes lose flavor in the fridge. Store at room temperature.
- **Mulch helps:** Straw or dried leaves around the base keep moisture steady and reduce soil splash onto leaves.
- **Support early:** Vines can reach 5–6 feet tall. Install cages or stakes while plants are small.

Mini Checklist

- Transplanted after last frost and warm nights
- Stem planted deep for stronger roots
- Cage or stake installed at planting
- Used check-first watering at the base
- Harvested ripe fruit every few days
- Removed excess suckers to keep plants manageable

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Tomato – Roma VF

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	DAYS TO MATURITY
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1/4 inch	75–80 Days

Why This Is Easy

Built-in resistance: The “VF” means this variety is naturally resistant to Verticillium and Fusarium wilts—two common soil diseases that frustrate many beginners.

Predictable growth: Roma VF is a determinate tomato. It grows into a compact, bushy plant, reaches a set size, and then focuses its energy on producing fruit all at once—great for sauces and bulk harvests.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch (for starting seeds indoors)
- **Spacing:** 18–24 inches apart
- **Container growing:** Performs well in 5-gallon containers or larger

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin/transplant:** When seedlings are 3–4 inches tall with their first true (jagged) leaves
- **First harvest:** About 70–80 days after transplanting
- **Harvest style:** Most fruit ripens within a short window—ideal for making sauce, paste, or salsa in one big batch

When to Plant

Roma tomatoes love warmth and have zero frost tolerance.

Spring: Transplant outdoors only after your last frost date, when nighttime temperatures stay above 55°F.

Summer: Peak growing season. Warm days and nights help develop thick, meaty fruit.

Cold warning: Sudden cold snaps can permanently stunt plants. Cover them if temperatures dip unexpectedly.

How to Plant

Starting indoors gives Roma VF enough time to mature properly.

Start indoors: Sow seeds 6–8 weeks before your last frost date. Use bright light or grow lights to prevent leggy seedlings.

Transplant deeply: Bury the stem up to the first set of leaves. Roots will form along the buried stem, creating a strong, stable plant.

Support: Even though Roma VF is bush-type, the fruit load gets heavy. Install a tomato cage or short, sturdy stake at planting time to keep fruit off the ground.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry 1 inch down → water deeply at the base

If damp → wait

Tip: Consistent moisture is critical for preventing fruit problems. Water early in the day so any splashed leaves dry quickly.

Sun & Shade

Full sun: At least 6–8 hours of direct sunlight is required for good fruit color and flavor

Airflow: Space plants well—Roma plants grow thick and need air moving through the leaves

Feeding (if applicable)

Mix compost into the soil at planting time.

Once small green fruits appear, a light side-dressing of compost helps support the main harvest.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

When to pick: Harvest when fruit is fully red, firm, and evenly colored.

Gentle twist: Romas should release easily with a slight twist. If you have to tug, give it more time.

End of season: Determinate plants finish after their main harvest. Once fruiting is done and no new flowers appear, the plant can be removed.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Blossom end rot (black spot on bottom of fruit):

Cause: Calcium imbalance caused by uneven watering

Fix: Keep soil moisture steady—avoid dry-to-soaked swings

Blight (brown spots on lower leaves):

Action: Remove leaves touching the soil. Mulch to prevent soil splash.

Fruit not setting:

Cause: Extreme heat (above 90°F days or 75°F nights)

Fix: Be patient—fruit set resumes once temperatures cool slightly

Quick Tips

- Don’t prune: Roma VF is determinate. Removing suckers reduces yield.
- **Mulch early:** Straw or wood chips help maintain even moisture and keep fruit clean.
- **Best for cooking:** Thick flesh, low water content, and fewer seeds make Romas perfect for sauces, pastes, roasting, and freezing.

Mini Checklist

- Transplanted after last frost and warm nights (55°F+)
- Stem planted deep for strong roots
- Cage or stake installed at planting
- Used check-first watering at the base
- Avoided pruning branches
- Harvested when fruit was fully red and firm

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Yellow Summer Squash

AT A GLANCE

SUN	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1 inch	3–4 feet
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
5–10 Days	45–60 Days	

Why This Is Easy

Massive production: One or two healthy plants will supply more squash than most families can keep up with all summer.

Fast payoff: Goes from seed to harvest in about 50 days, making it one of the most rewarding beginner crops.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** 24–36 inches apart (plants grow into large, wide bushes)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–10 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have their first true (jagged) leaves—keep the strongest plant per spot
- **First harvest:** 45–55 days
- **Ongoing harvest:** Once production starts, check plants daily

When to Plant

Yellow squash is a warm-weather crop with zero frost tolerance.

Spring: Plant only after your last frost date, once soil feels warm to the touch.

Summer: A second planting in mid-summer can extend harvest into early fall.

Cold warning: If a late frost threatens after planting, cover seedlings overnight with a bucket, cloth, or row cover.

How to Plant

Direct sowing works best—squash grows fast and dislikes root disturbance.

Prepare: Choose a sunny spot and mix in compost. Squash are heavy feeders and thrive in rich soil.

Sow: Plant 2–3 seeds in a small cluster (often called a “hill”) about 1 inch deep.

Cover: Smooth soil over seeds and gently firm for good contact.

Water: Water well immediately after planting. Keep soil moist (not soggy) until sprouts appear.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry 1 inch down → water deeply at the base

If damp → wait

Tip: Large squash leaves can hide dry soil underneath. Always check with your finger. Water only at the soil—wet leaves encourage powdery mildew.

Sun & Shade

Full sun: At least 6–8 hours daily

Heat response: Leaves may wilt in extreme heat to protect themselves. If they recover in the evening, the plant is fine.

Feeding (if applicable)

If leaves look pale or growth slows, side-dress with compost or a light organic fertilizer once flowering begins.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Pick early, pick often: Harvest squash at 6–8 inches long for best flavor and texture.

Don’t wait: Oversized squash become tough, seedy, and signal the plant to stop producing.

Use tools: Cut squash from the plant with scissors or a knife—pulling can damage the main stem.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Powdery mildew (white dusty coating on leaves):

Action: Improve airflow with proper spacing. Water only at the base. Remove the worst affected leaves.

Squash bugs (gray, shield-shaped insects):

Action: Check undersides of leaves for bronze egg clusters and rub them off. Hand-pick adults and drop into soapy water.

Fruit rotting at the tip:

Cause: Blossom end rot from uneven watering

Fix: Maintain steady moisture using the check-first watering rule

Quick Tips

- **Space matters:** Proper spacing prevents most disease issues.
- **Two hands when harvesting:** Hold the plant with one hand and cut with the other.
- **Daily walk:** Once fruiting starts, squash can grow an inch a day—check plants every morning.

Mini Checklist

- Soil warm and frost danger passed
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep in rich soil
- Seedlings thinned to strongest plant
- Watering at soil level (leaves kept dry)
- Harvested at 6–8 inches long
- Checked undersides of leaves weekly for squash bug eggs

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile