FREE · INCLUDED WITH EVERY VIMTOBA SEED KIT

The Vimtoba Planting Guide

~ seed to harvest, made simple ~

43 chapters · USA-grown heirloom seeds · 13 chapters on the basics, 30 on individual plants

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.

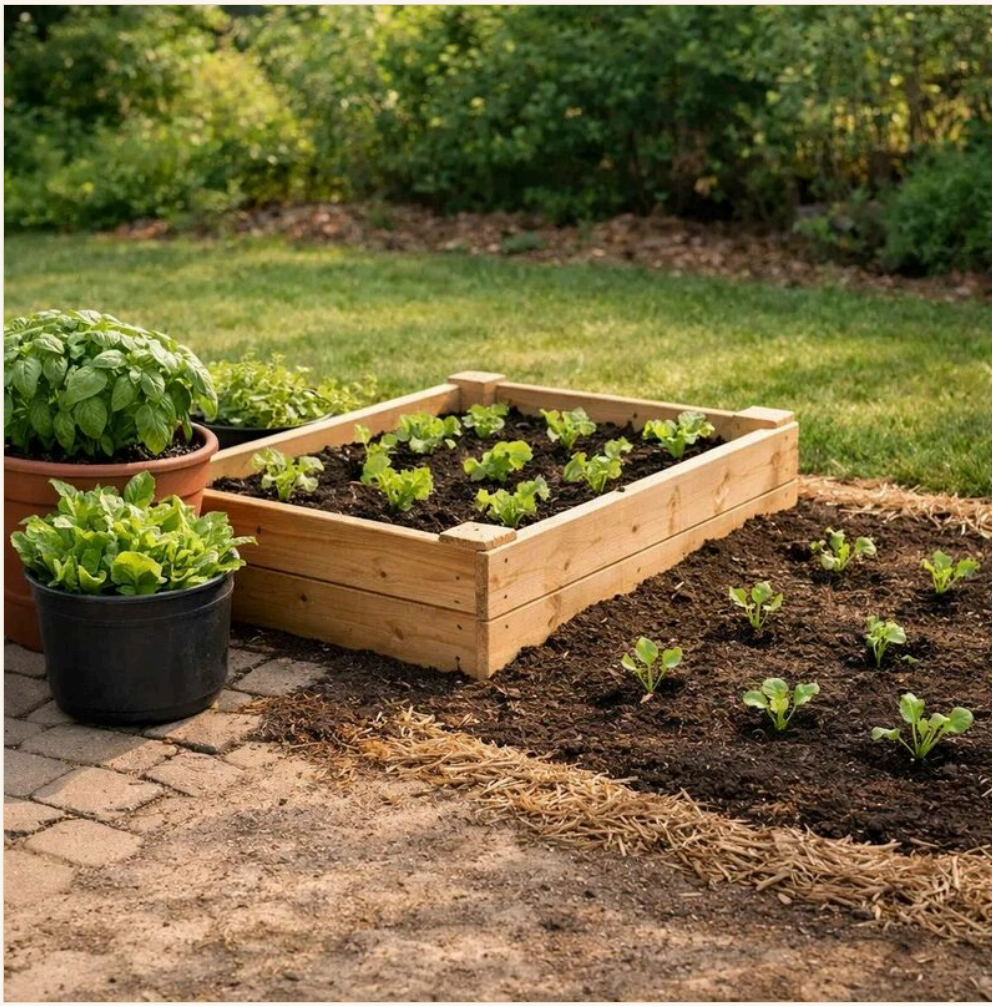
> *"Quality you can trust — across every seed we sell. If something isn't right, we make it right."*

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

43 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.

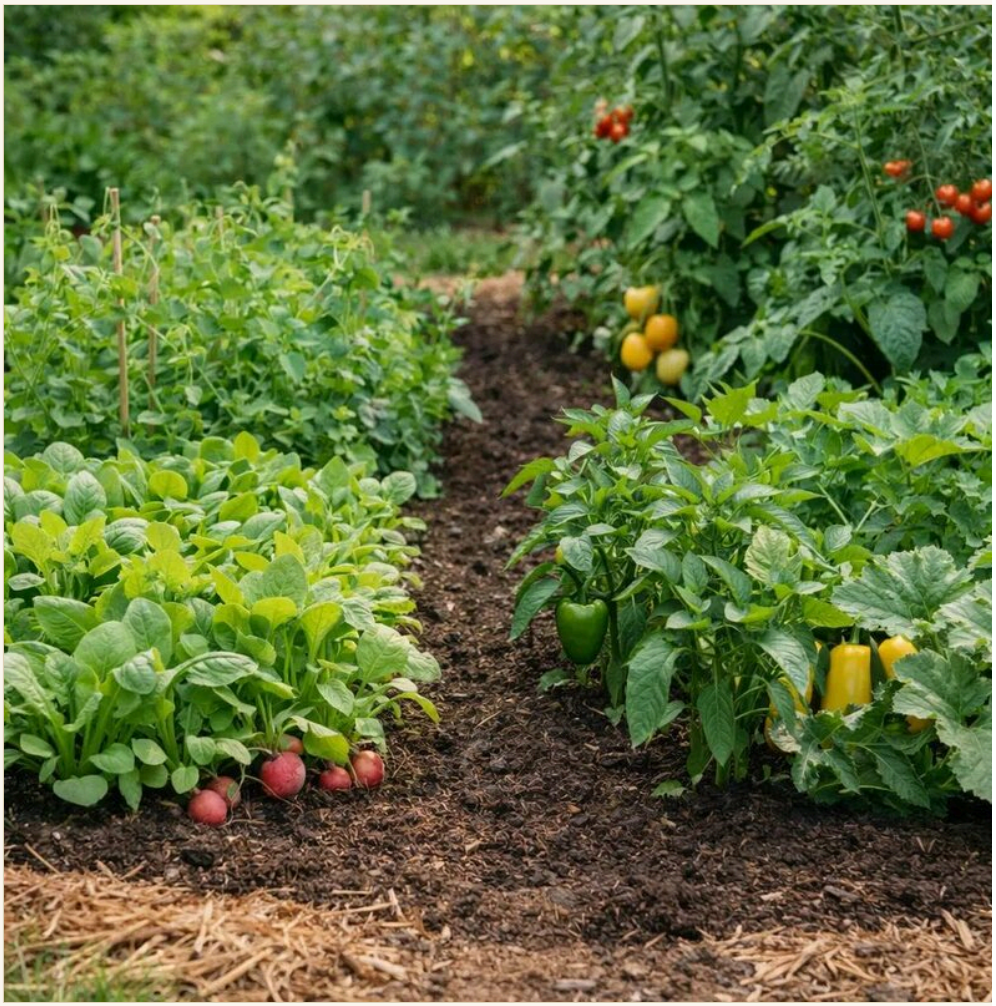
Quick Tips

- 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.

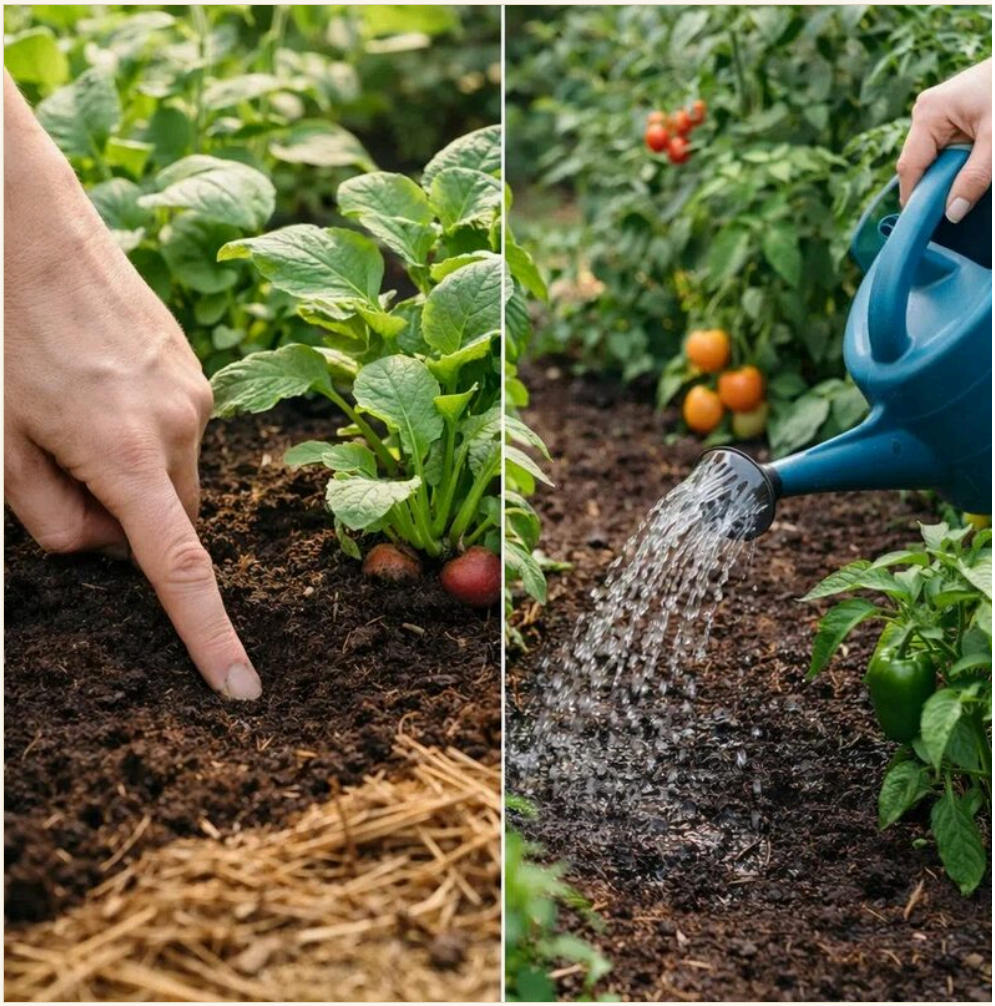
Quick Tips

- 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.

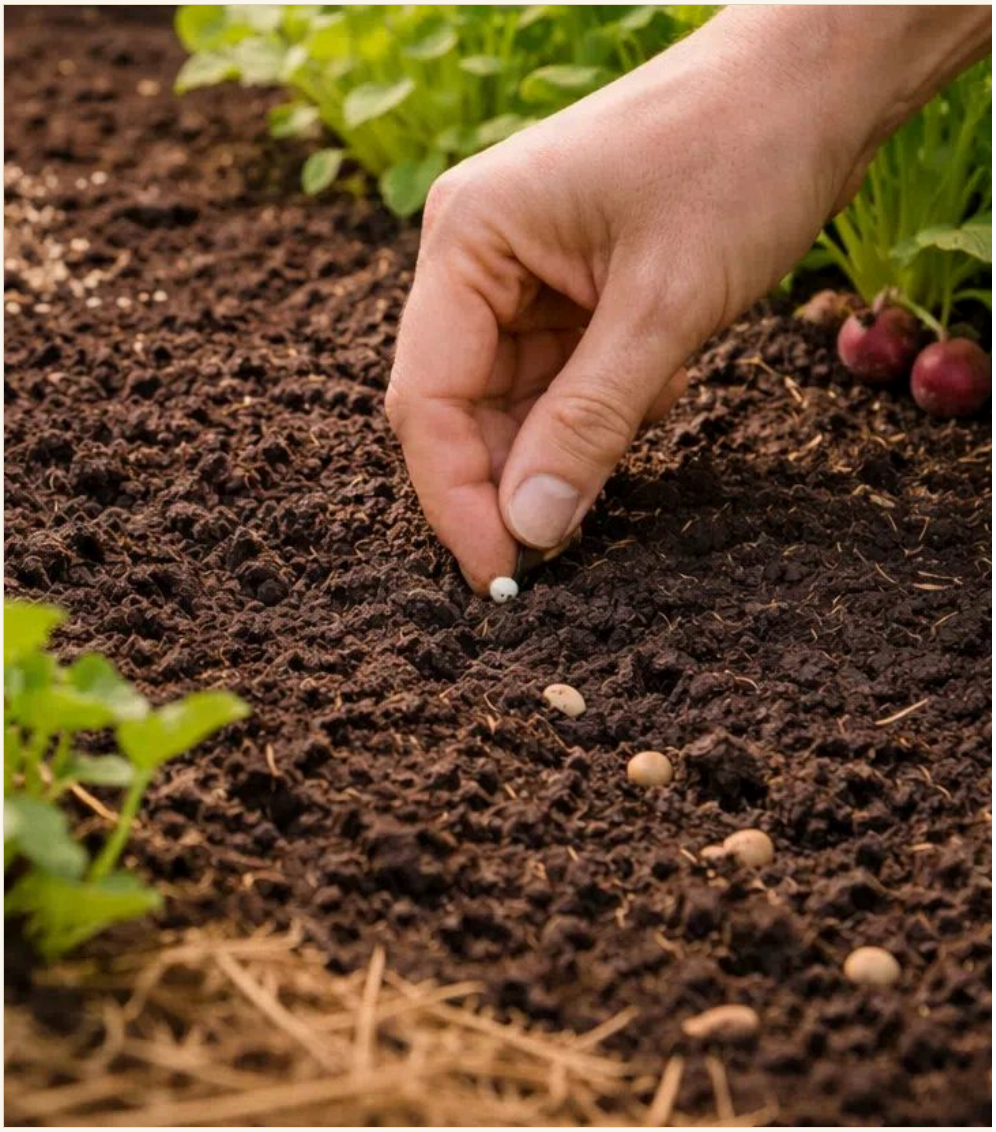
Quick Tips

- 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.

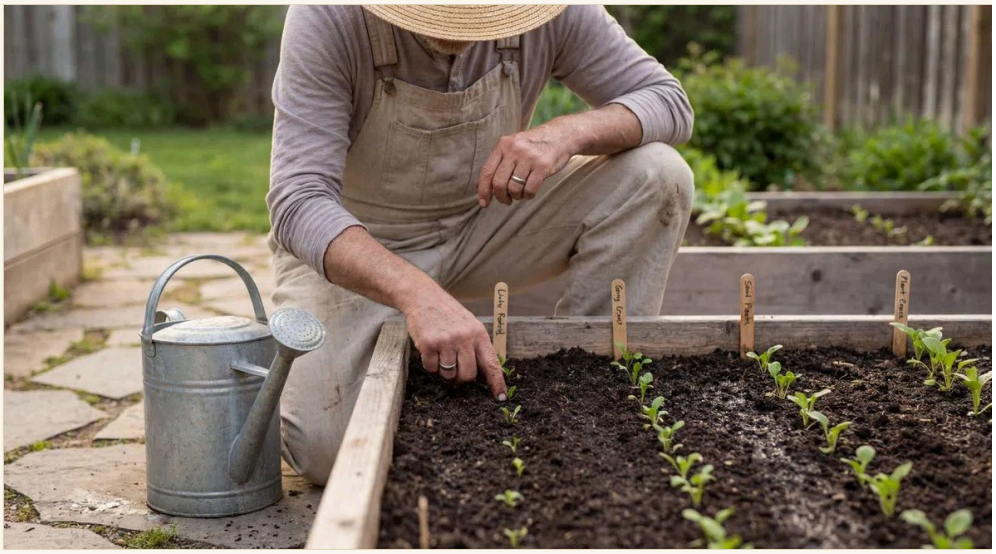
Quick Tips

- 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.

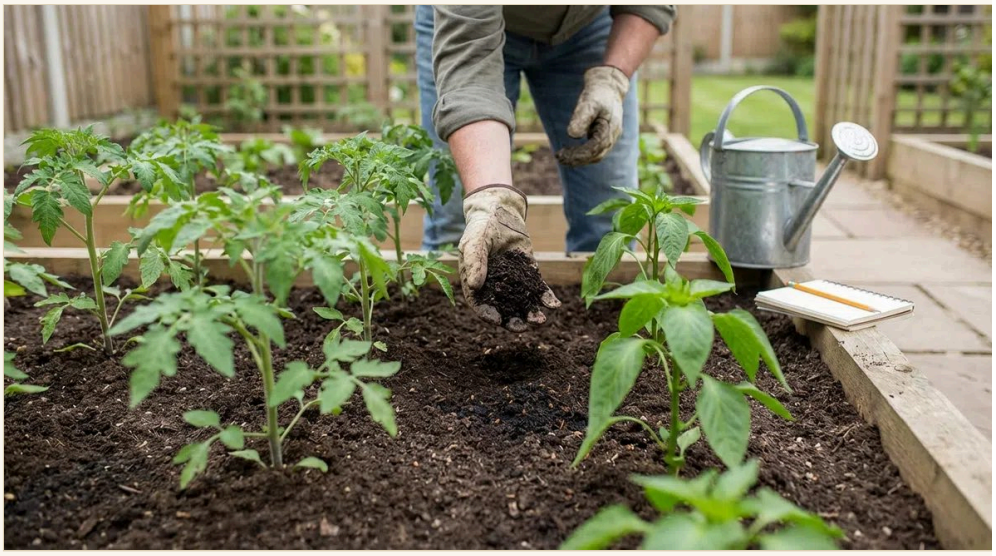
Quick Tips

- 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.

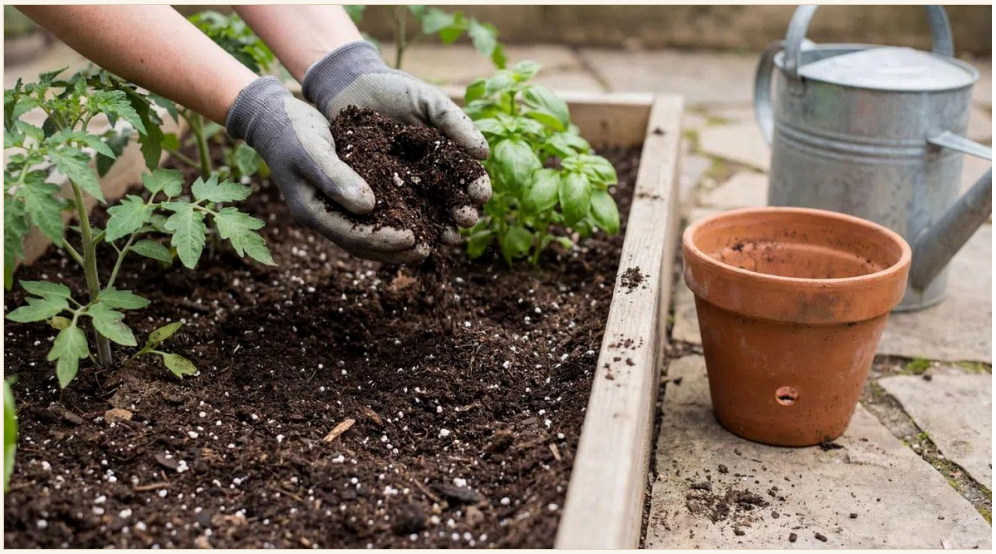
Quick Tips

- 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.

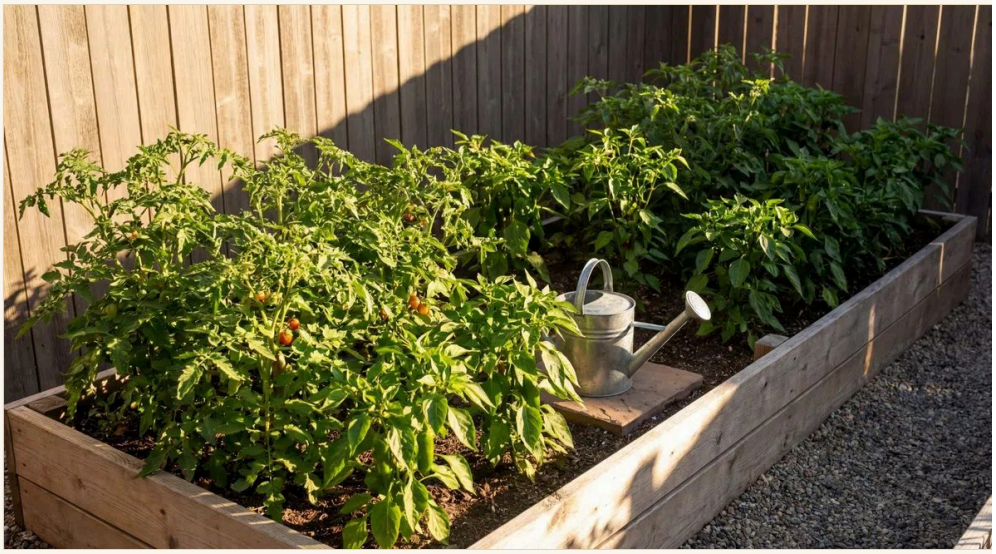
Quick Tips

- 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.

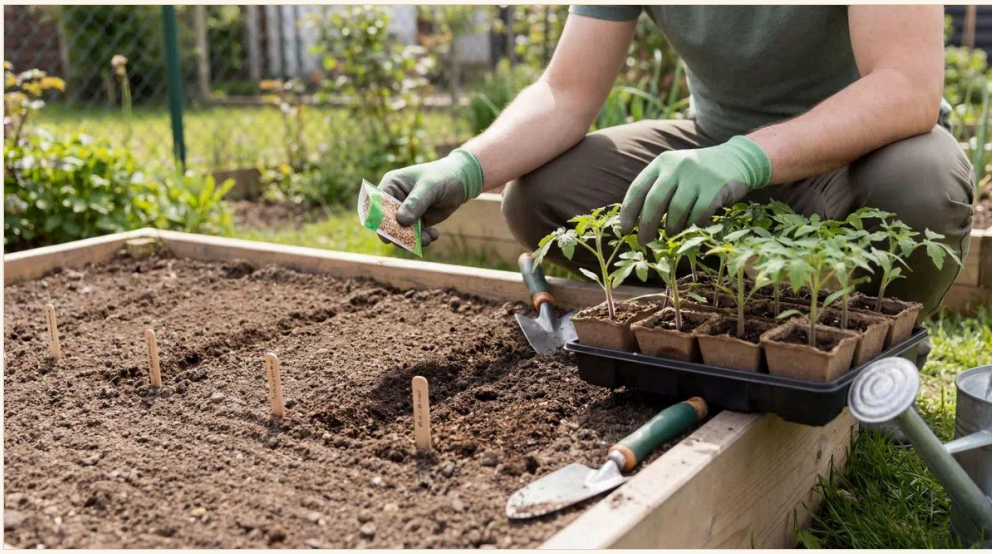
Quick Tips

- 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.

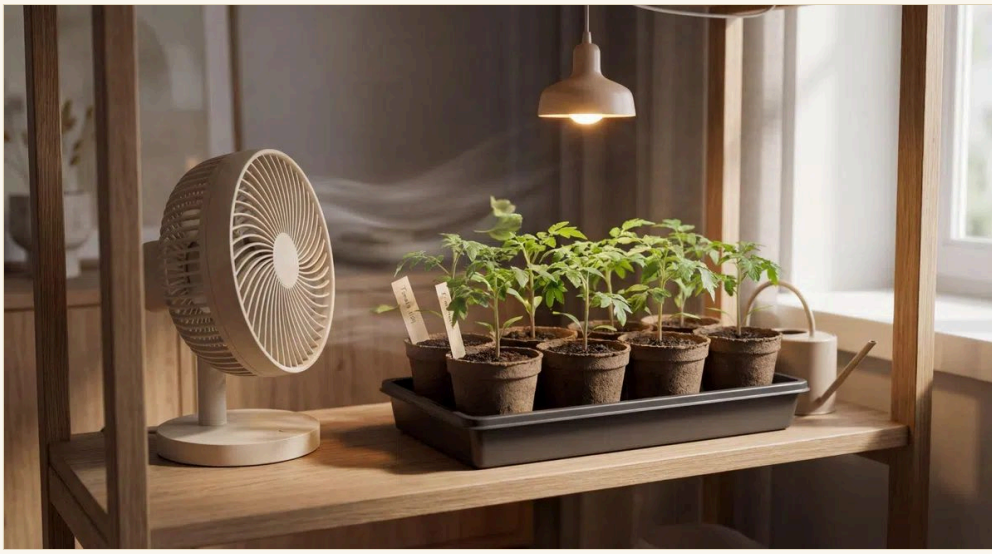
Quick Tips

- 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.

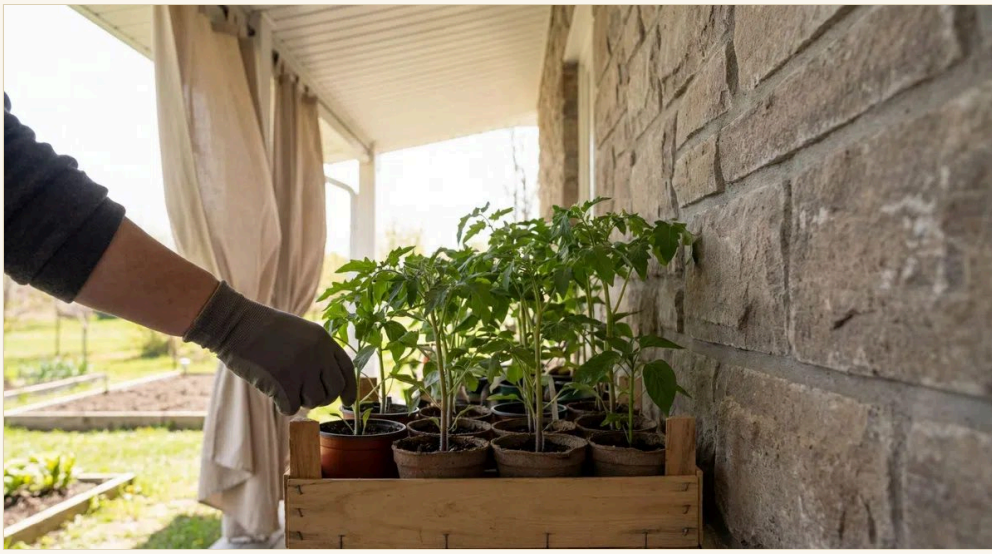
Quick Tips

- 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.

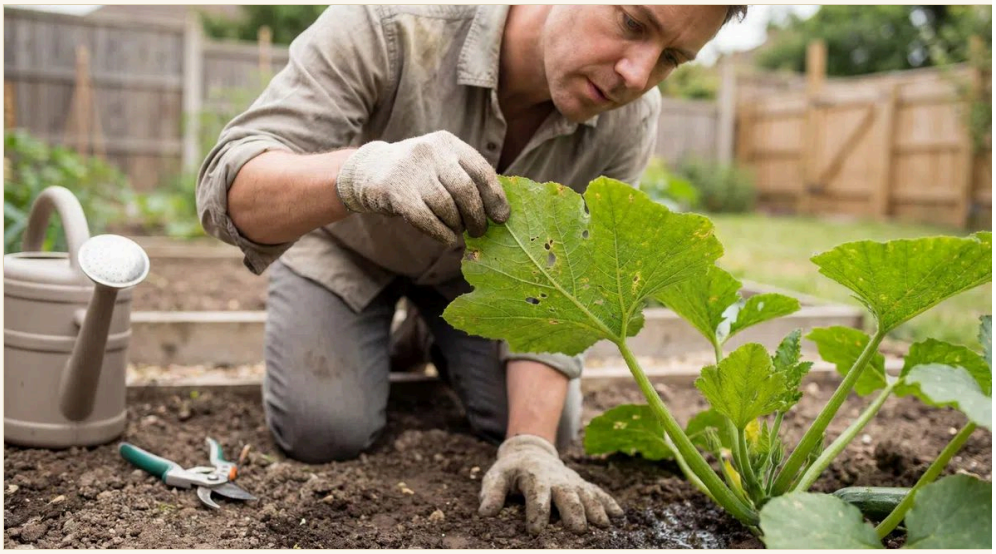
Quick Tips

- 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.

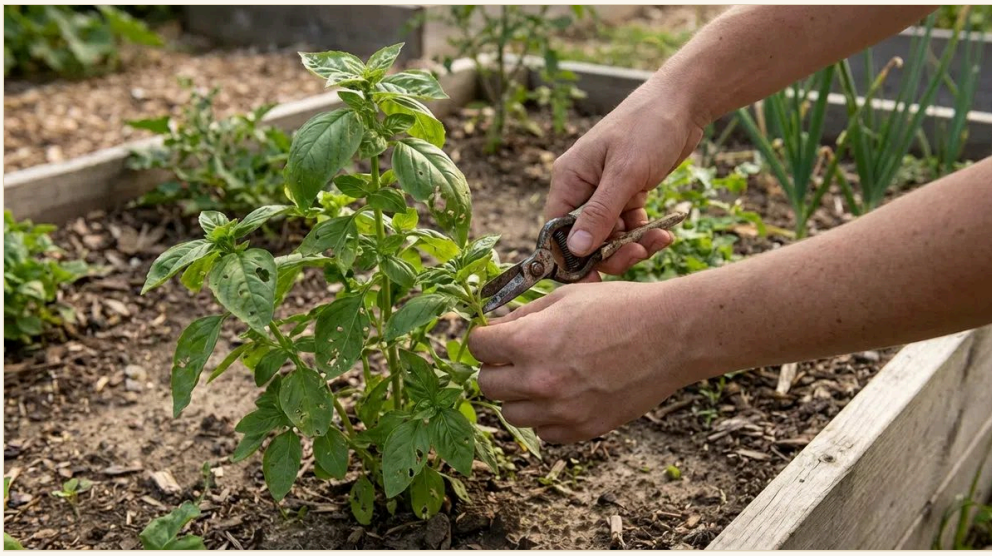
Quick Tips

- 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

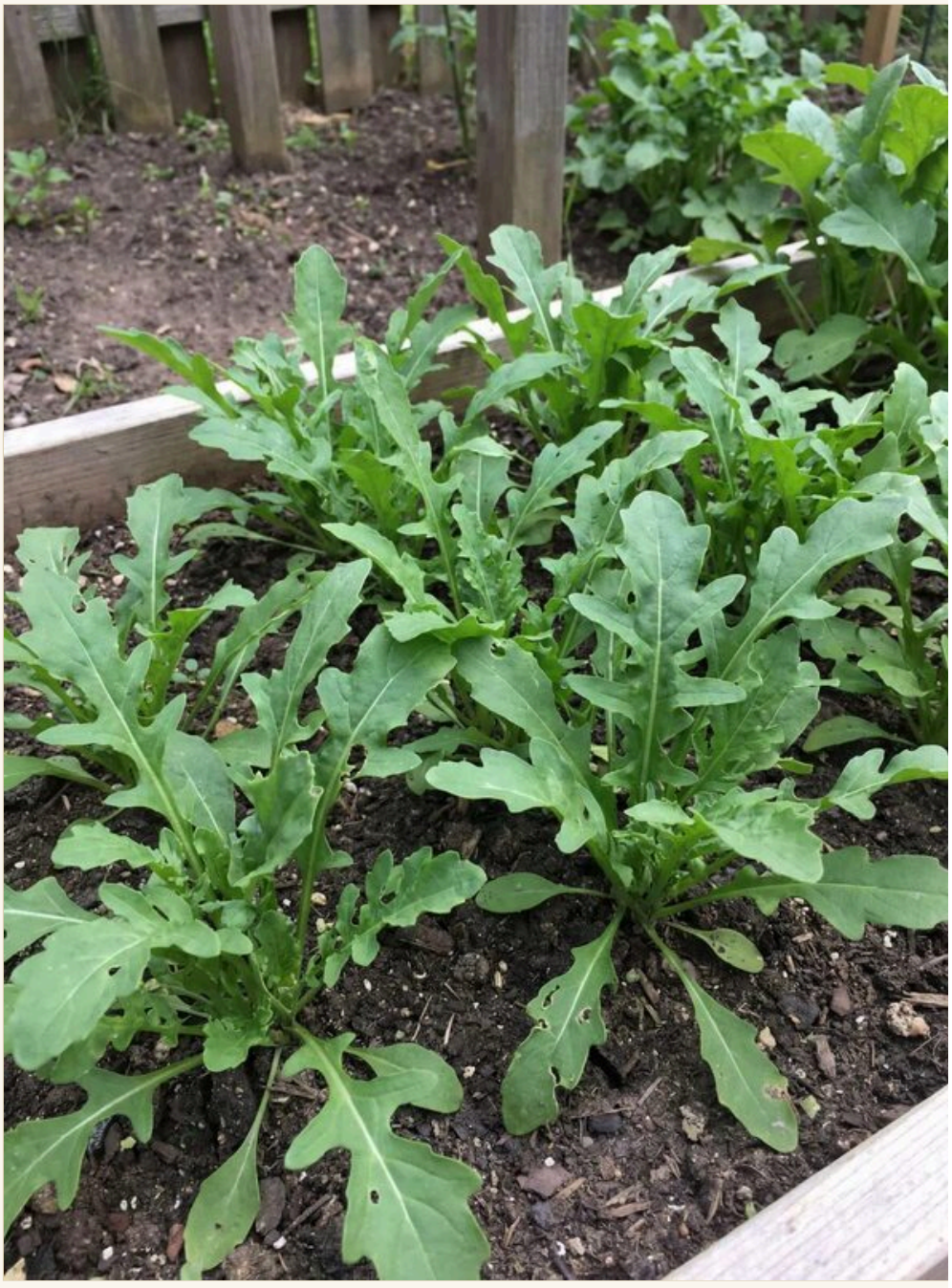
- If you’re nervous, start small — just a few leaves or stems.
- Clean snips reduce damage and make harvesting easy.
- Regular picking can reduce bitterness and delay bolting (going to flower).
- Take a quick photo + note what you harvested — you’ll learn timing fast.

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

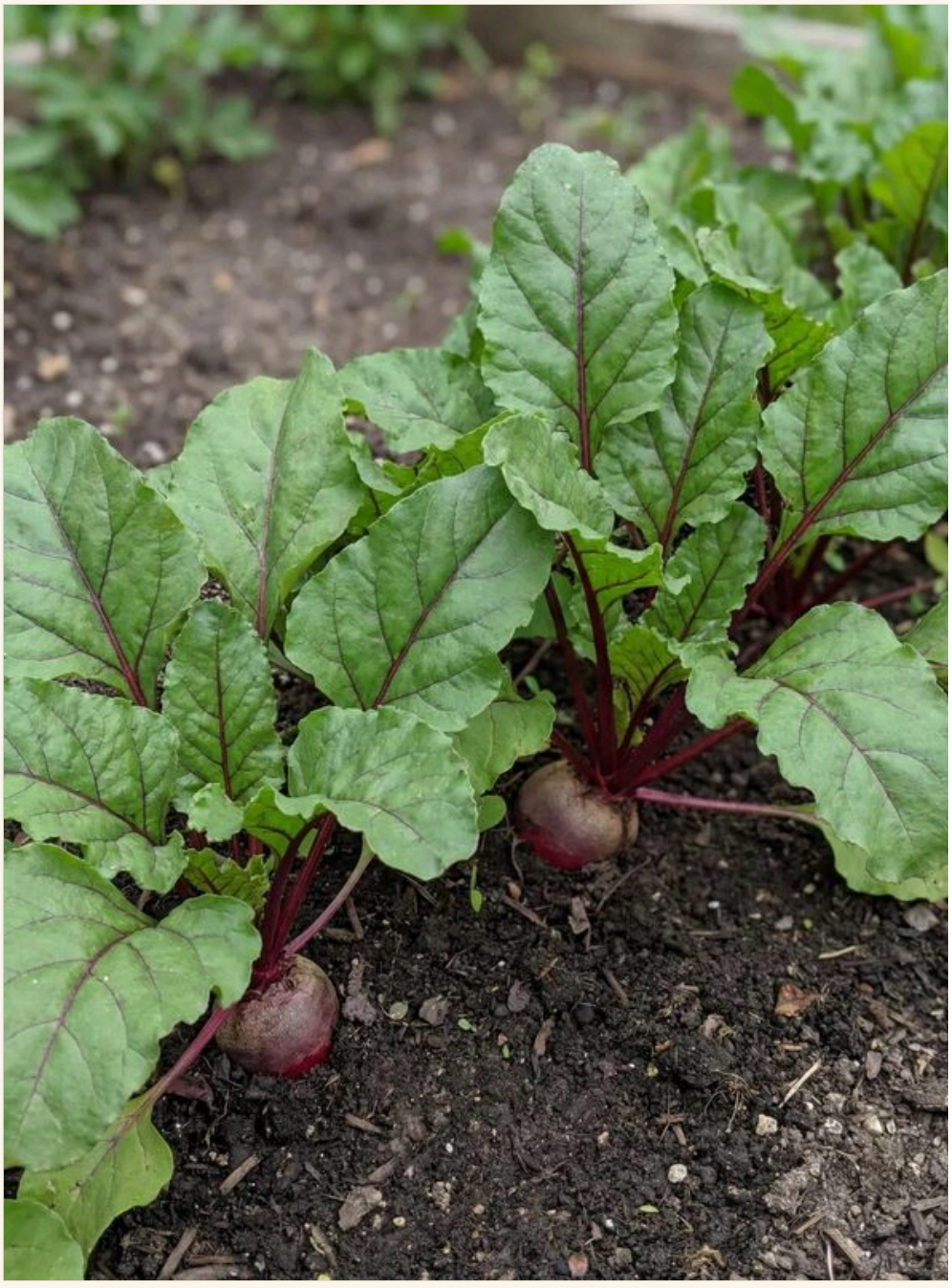
- Pinching = More Basil: Frequent harvesting leads to bushier, more productive plants.
- **Warm Soil Matters:** Planting too early slows growth and can stunt basil.
- **Harvest Before Frost:** Basil is killed by frost. When cold weather approaches, harvest everything and preserve it by freezing, drying,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

Beet – Detroit



Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/2 inch
- **Spacing / thinning:** Thin to 2–3 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are about 2 inches tall (or once they have true leaves and feel sturdy)
- Harvest window (roots): About 50–70 days from sowing

When to Plant

Beets are a cool-weather crop. Plant in spring once the soil is workable, and plant again later for a fall crop as days begin to cool. Beets generally struggle more in heat than in cool conditions, so aim for the cooler parts of the season.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is the easiest option for beginners.

Prepare the bed so the soil is loose and drains well.

Smooth the surface so seedlings can push through easily without getting trapped under soil clumps.

Sow seeds at the depth listed above, cover gently, and press the soil lightly for good seed-to-soil contact.

Important beet “seed” tip: What looks like a single seed is usually a small cluster that can sprout multiple seedlings in the same spot. This is why thinning is especially important with beets.

Transplanting: Beets can be transplanted carefully, but direct sowing is simpler and usually produces straighter roots.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Beets are low-maintenance once established. Steady moisture keeps roots tender.

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry

More simple care:

Keep moisture consistent, especially while seedlings are small.

Sun & Shade If heat arrives, light afternoon shade can help reduce plant stress.

Feeding (if applicable) Mixing compost into the soil before planting is usually sufficient. Keep weeds under control early, as young beets do not compete well.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

You can harvest beets in two simple ways:

Greens

Pick a few leaves from each plant as needed.

Avoid stripping plants bare—leave enough leaves for the root to continue growing.

Roots

Harvest when the root looks and feels like a usable size.

If soil is firm, loosen gently before pulling to prevent snapping roots.

Harvest some plants early and leave others to continue sizing up.

Overview

Why This Is Easy Beets grow well in cool weather and require no support or special care. You can harvest both the greens and the roots, so you still get food even if the roots stay smaller than expected.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Nothing sprouted yet

Avoid replanting too quickly—compare timing to the sprout window above.

Keep the soil surface evenly moist (not soggy).

If the surface crusted, gently rough up the top layer without digging deeply.

If seeds likely dried out repeatedly or washed away, reseed a small section and keep it steadily moist.

Crowding (most common beet mistake)

Seed clusters often cause multiple seedlings to emerge in one spot.

Thin at the stage listed in the Timeline.

Thin gently by snipping extras at soil level, or pull the smallest seedlings when soil is damp to reduce disturbance.

Woody or tough roots

Usually caused by stress from uneven moisture, heat, or slow growth.

Fix: Keep moisture more consistent and harvest before roots remain under stress for too long.

Cracking roots

Often caused by moisture swings (very dry followed by very wet).

Fix: Use check-first watering to keep moisture more even.

Leaf damage (see-through, blotchy, or chewed)

Remove heavily damaged leaves.

Check undersides of leaves regularly.

Rinse plants with a firm spray of water.

Use a light cover or netting if pests continue to return.

Quick Tips

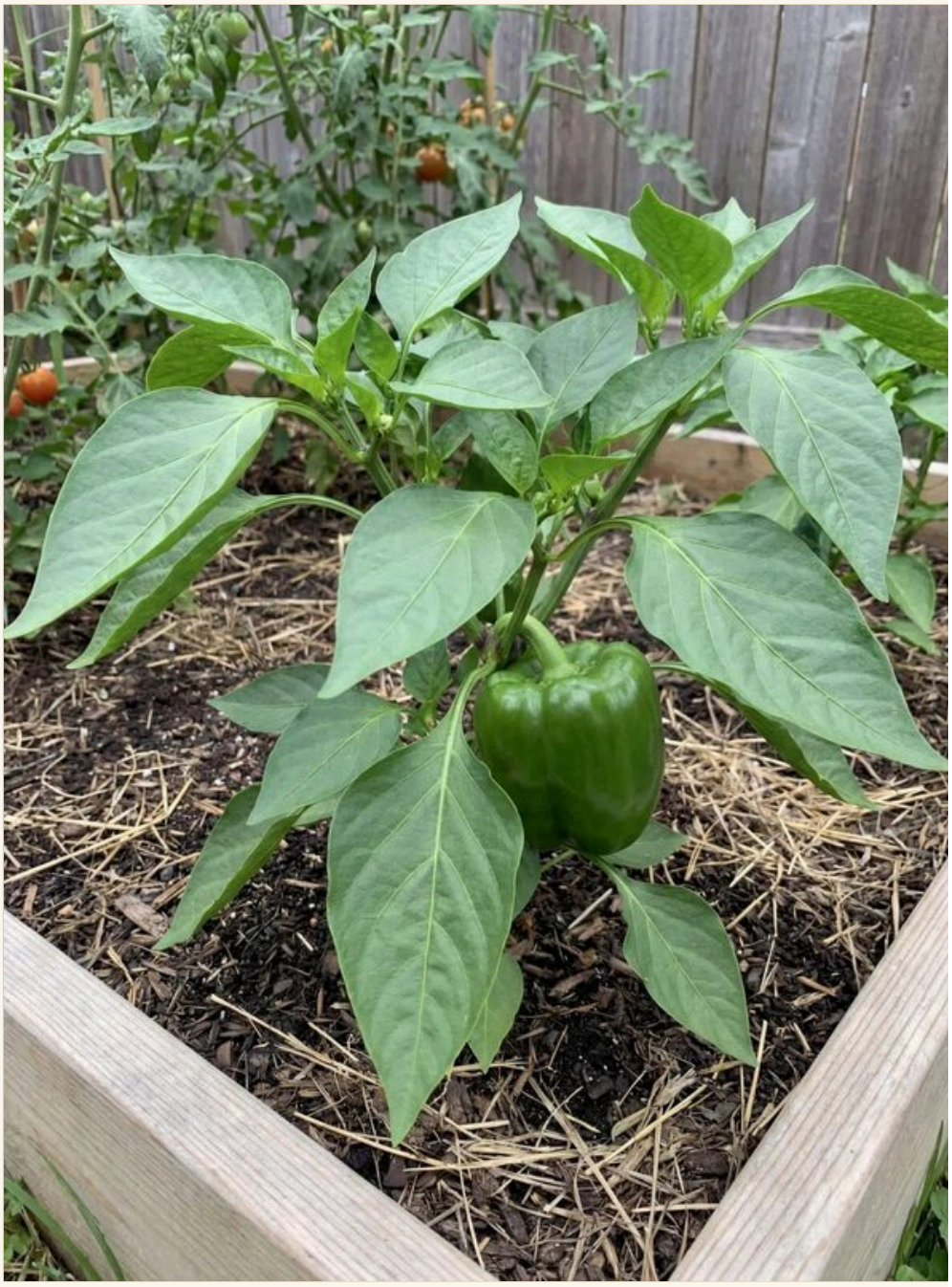
- Expect multiple seedlings per “seed” and plan to thin.
- Keep the soil surface consistently moist until seedlings are clearly established.
- Harvest gradually—greens first, roots as they size up.
- Steady moisture helps prevent tough roots and cracking.

Mini Checklist

- Direct sown at the correct depth
- Soil surface kept evenly moist through the sprout window
- Watched for multiple seedlings per spot (seed clusters)
- Thinned at the stage listed in the Timeline
- Used check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Weeded early to prevent competition
- Harvested greens and roots as needed before stress affects quality

[#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

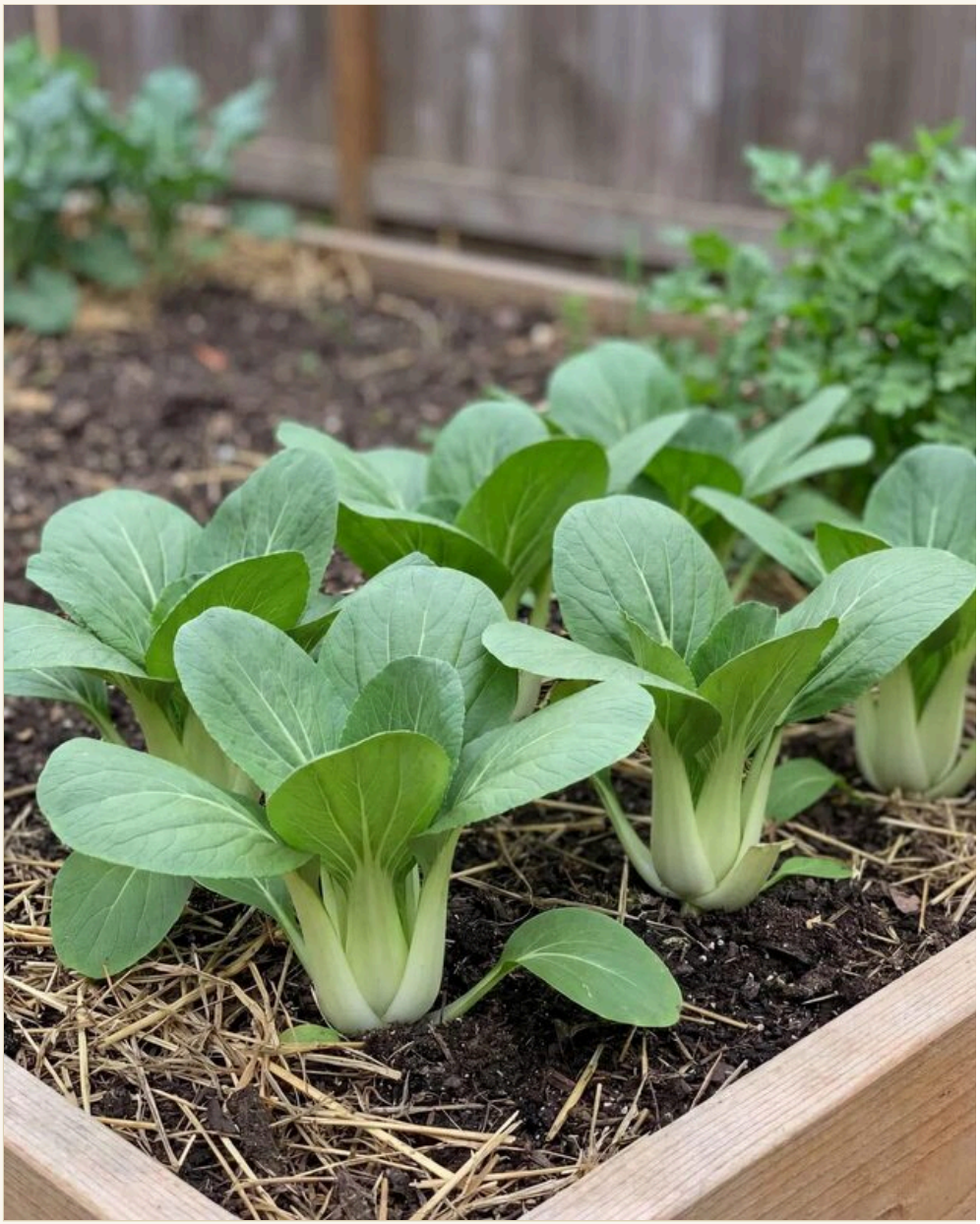
- **Warmth Is Everything:** Avoid planting too early. Peppers grown in cold soil often never fully recover.
- **Support Heavy Plants:** As fruit develops, plants may become top-heavy. A small stake or cage helps prevent breakage.
- **Harvest Before Frost:** Peppers are killed by frost. When cold weather 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	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun / Partial Shade	1/4 to 1/2 inch	12 inches
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
8–14 Days	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

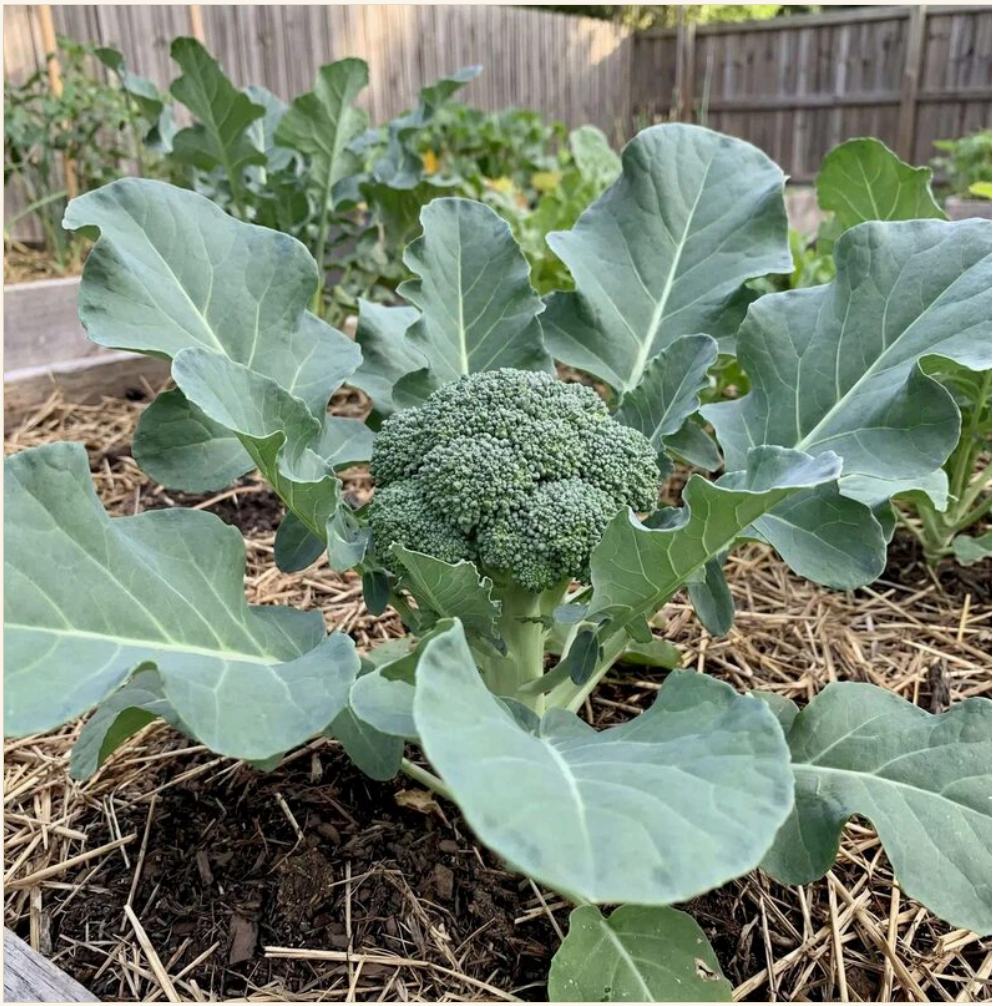
- Plant during cooler weather for the sweetest leaves.
- As temperatures rise, harvest earlier rather than waiting.
- Harvest outer leaves first to keep the center growing.

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

Broccoli – Sprouting Calabrese



Why This Is Easy

Clear harvest goal: Broccoli produces one main central head, making it easy to know when it's ready to harvest.

Reliable in cool weather: With steady moisture and simple care, broccoli grows consistently in cooler conditions.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4–1/2 inch
- **Spacing / thinning:** 18–24 inches between plants
- **Row spacing:** 24–36 inches between rows

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 4–10 days (may take longer in cool soil)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have 2–3 true leaves (keep the strongest plant)
- When to transplant (if started indoors): About 4–6 weeks after sowing, once seedlings are sturdy with several true leaves
- First harvest window (central head): About 60–75 days after transplanting
- **Regrowth / side-shoot note:** After the main head is harvested, many plants continue producing smaller side shoots that can be harvested like mini heads.

When to Plant

Broccoli is a cool-weather crop, and timing is critical.

Spring: Plan planting so the main head forms before sustained heat arrives.

Fall: Plan planting so head formation happens as temperatures cool. If broccoli encounters heat while forming a head, it may rush growth, loosen, or lose quality.

How to Plant

Broccoli can be direct sown, but many beginners find starting indoors and transplanting easier.

Best beginner path (start indoors, then transplant):

Provides a head start during cool seasons.

Stronger seedlings are easier to protect from pests.

Transplants often form more reliable heads than very young direct-sown plants during variable weather.

Direct sow (effective, but requires more attention early):

Sow at the correct depth, keep the soil surface evenly moist, and thin to final spacing.

Be prepared to protect young seedlings from pests and temperature swings.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry Broccoli prefers steady moisture, especially while the main head is developing. Large swings can cause stress.

Sun & Shade

Warm spell tip: During unexpected heat, light afternoon shade combined with consistent moisture helps protect head quality.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Compost mixed into the soil at planting, or a light top-dressing later, is usually sufficient.

Mulch: Helps maintain even moisture and suppress weeds.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Broccoli offers a main harvest followed by continued production.

Central head: Harvest when the head is firm and tight, before buds begin to open. Cut the stalk below the head using a clean knife.

Side shoots: Leave the plant in place after the main harvest. Smaller shoots often form along the sides and can be harvested while still tight.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Cabbage worms / loopers (chewed leaves, droppings):

Inspect leaf undersides regularly.

Hand-pick pests when found.

Use light netting or row cover to prevent egg-laying.

Aphids (clusters of tiny insects, sticky leaves):

Rinse off with water.

Remove heavily infested leaves.

Maintain steady moisture to reduce plant stress.

Flea beetles (“shot holes,” most damaging to young plants):

Use light netting or row cover early.

Keep growth steady, as stressed plants are more vulnerable.

Loose head or poor head formation (large leaves, weak head):

Common causes include heat stress, crowding, uneven moisture, or excess nitrogen.

Fix by improving spacing, maintaining steadier moisture, and planting for cooler conditions.

Bolting (rapid flowering):

Usually caused by stress, especially heat.

Harvest what is usable and adjust future planting so head formation occurs in cooler weather.

Quick Tips

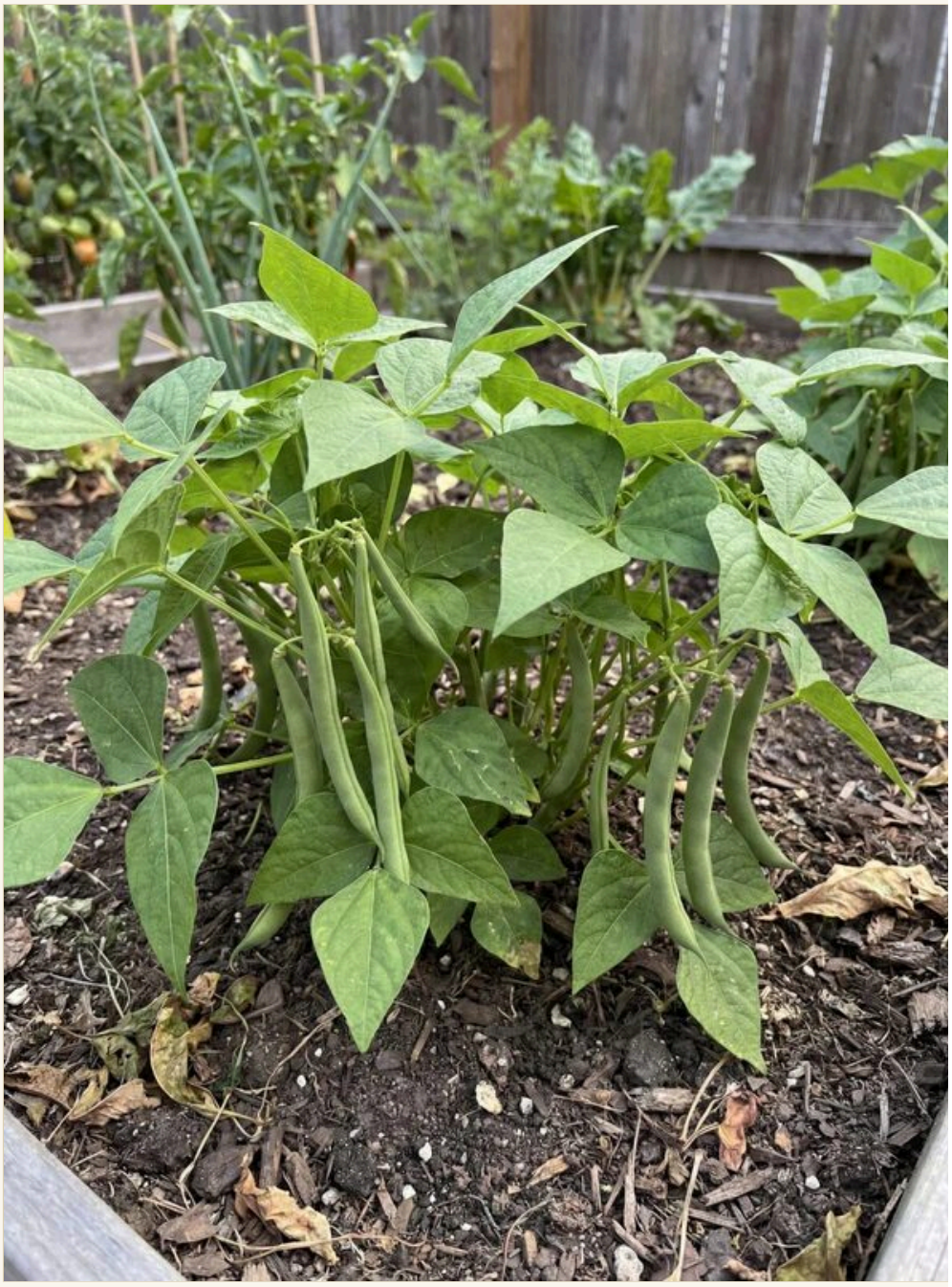
- For the easiest results, start seeds indoors and transplant into cool weather.
- Harvest the central head slightly early rather than late—tight buds are ideal.
- Leave plants after the main harvest to continue collecting side shoots.

Mini Checklist

- Planted for cool weather so head forms before heat
- Seeds sown at the correct depth and thinned to proper spacing
- Used check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Weeds kept under control to reduce competition
- Leaf undersides inspected regularly for pests
- Light netting or row cover used if pests persist
- Central head harvested while tight, with side shoots harvested afterward

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Blue Lake Bush Beans



Why This Is Easy

Fast and rewarding: Bush beans produce quickly, with the first harvest often ready in under two months and heavy picking soon after.

No support needed: Unlike pole beans, bush beans stay compact and do not require trellises or stakes—just plant and harvest.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 3–4 inches apart.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–10 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–4 inches tall
- **First harvest:** 50–60 days
- **Harvest window:** About 2–3 weeks of heavy picking, after which production slows
- **Heat note:** Plants may drop blossoms or pause production when temperatures stay above 90°F.

When to Plant

Bush beans are a “warm-weather crop” and need warm soil to sprout and grow well.

Spring: Plant after your local last frost date and once soil has warmed to at least 60°F. Cold, wet soil can cause seeds to rot.

Summer: The main growing season. For an extended harvest, plant new batches every 2–3 weeks through early summer.

Fall: A late-summer planting can produce a fall crop if there is enough time before the first frost.

Cold warning: Do not plant too early. Bean seeds rot easily in cold, wet soil.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is the simplest and most reliable method, as beans do not transplant well.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location with well-draining soil and loosen the top layer.

Sow: Push seeds about 1 inch deep, spacing them 2–3 inches apart in the row.

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

Water: Water once after planting, then wait until sprouts appear unless conditions are very hot and dry. Overwatering before sprouting can cause rot.

Rows: Space rows 18–24 inches apart for easy access during harvest.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Beans need consistent moisture, especially during flowering and pod formation.

If soil feels dry → Water deeply.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Dry soil during flowering can cause blossoms to drop and pods to become tough. Keep moisture even.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

Beans prefer full sun, with at least 6 hours daily.

During extreme heat (above 90°F), plants may temporarily stop setting pods and will resume when temperatures cool.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Beans fix their own nitrogen and require little fertilizer. Compost mixed into the soil at planting is usually sufficient. Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers, which promote leaves over pods.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Pick Early and Often: Harvest pods when they are firm, crisp, and about 5–6 inches long, before seeds inside begin to bulge.

Don’t Wait: Overmature pods signal the plant to stop producing.

Use Two Hands: Support the stem with one hand while picking with the other to avoid breaking brittle branches.

Harvest Dry: Pick when foliage is dry to reduce disease spread.

Flavor Note: Young, slender pods are the most tender and sweet. Check plants every 2–3 days during peak production.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

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

Action: Wait for warmer soil (at least 60°F) before replanting and avoid excess watering before emergence.

Blossom drop (flowers fall without forming beans):

Cause: Usually heat stress (temperatures above 90°F) or drought.

Action: Keep soil evenly moist and wait for cooler conditions.

Tough, stringy pods:

Cause: Pods were harvested too late or plants were stressed by dry soil.

Action: Harvest earlier and maintain consistent moisture.

Holes in leaves:

Cause: Mexican bean beetles or other chewing pests.

Action: Check leaf undersides, hand-pick pests, remove heavily damaged leaves, and keep the area clean.

Yellowing leaves or spots:

Cause: Often a fungal or bacterial issue, especially in wet conditions.

Action: Avoid wetting leaves during watering, remove affected plants, do not harvest when plants are wet, and rotate crops next season.

Quick Tips

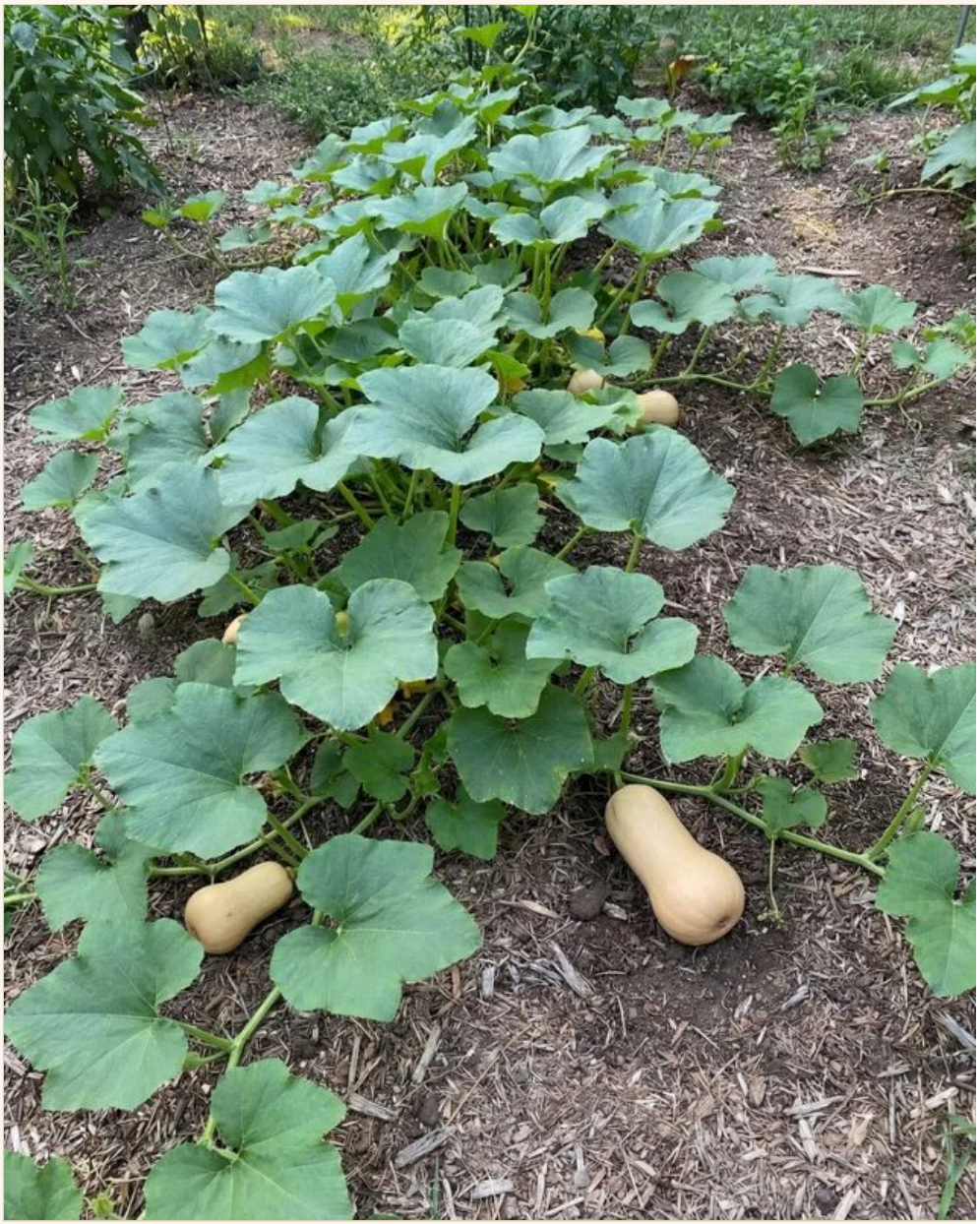
- **Direct Sow Only:** Beans have delicate roots and grow best when planted in place.
- **Succession Planting:** Sow new rows every 2–3 weeks through early summer for a longer harvest.
- **Keep Picking:** Frequent harvesting keeps plants producing.
- **Harvest Dry:** Picking dry plants helps prevent disease spread.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost once soil reached 60°F
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep
- Watered once at planting, then waited for sprouts
- Soil kept evenly moist during flowering
- Harvested every 2–3 days during peak production
- Picked pods before seeds bulged
- Used two hands to avoid breaking branches
- Monitored for pests and removed damaged leaves

[#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

Cabbage

Why This Is Easy

Thrives in cool weather: Cabbage grows best outside of peak summer heat and does not require perfect warm-season conditions.

Clear success marker: One healthy plant produces one solid head, making progress and harvest timing easy to recognize.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** Sow seeds 1/4–1/2 inch deep
- Spacing (for full heads): 18–24 inches between plants
- **Row spacing:** 24–30 inches between rows
- **Direct sow shortcut:** Sow several seeds per spot, then thin to the strongest single plant at final spacing

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 4–10 days (may take longer in cool soil)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have 2–4 true leaves (keep the strongest plant)
- When to transplant (if started indoors): About 4–6 weeks after sowing, once plants are sturdy with several true leaves
- **Harvest window:** Many varieties are ready about 70–100+ days after transplanting
- Some early varieties mature sooner
- **If direct sown:** Expect harvest to be later than transplanted cabbage

When to Plant

Cabbage is a cool-weather crop. The simplest approach is to plan around moderate temperatures.

Spring: Plant so growth and head formation happen before sustained heat arrives.

Fall: Plant so heads form as temperatures cool again. If cabbage grows in prolonged heat, it may produce leaves but struggle to form a tight, sweet head.

How to Plant

Best beginner method (start indoors → transplant):

Start seeds in small containers.

Provide bright light to keep seedlings compact rather than tall and weak.

Harden off seedlings gradually, then transplant into the garden.

Direct sow option (works, but slower):

Sow seeds at the proper depth, keep soil lightly moist, and thin to final spacing.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry slightly Aim for steady moisture. Large swings between dry and wet conditions can cause problems later.

Sun & Shade

Feeding (if applicable)

Other simple care:

Keep weeds under control so cabbage does not compete for water and nutrients.

Compost mixed into the soil is usually sufficient for beginner gardens.

Mulch is optional but helpful for maintaining even moisture and reducing weeds.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Harvest when the head feels firm and tight.

Cut the head at the base using a clean knife.

After harvest:

Most cabbage plants produce a single head, which is normal.

Occasionally, smaller side heads or sprouts may form if the stem and some outer leaves are left in place. Consider this a bonus rather than an expectation.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Cabbage worms / loopers (holes, chewed edges):

Inspect undersides of leaves regularly.

Hand-pick pests when found.

Use light netting or row cover to prevent egg-laying.

Aphids (clusters of small insects, sticky leaves):

Rinse off with water.

Remove heavily infested leaves if needed.

Splitting heads (cracks near harvest):

Usually caused by moisture swings, such as a dry period followed by heavy watering or rain.

Keep watering more consistent and harvest promptly once heads are firm.

Bolting (flower stalk instead of a head):

Often triggered when young plants experience extended cold followed by warm weather.

Protect young plants from hard cold snaps and maintain steady growth.

Loose heads or no head forming:

Most often caused by excess heat, crowding, uneven moisture, or weak early growth.

Address basics first: spacing, moisture consistency, weed control, and adequate sunlight.

Quick Tips

- For the easiest results, start seeds indoors and transplant.
- Thin early—crowding is one of the fastest ways to end up with small or loose heads.
- Harvest promptly once the head is firm to reduce the risk of splitting.

Mini Checklist

- Selected a cool-weather planting window (spring or fall)
- Seeds sown at the correct depth
- Seedlings thinned to proper spacing
- Used check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Weeds kept under control and moisture kept steady
- Leaf undersides inspected regularly for pests
- Heads harvested when firm, using a clean cut

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Carrot – Scarlet Nantes

Why This Is Easy

Low maintenance after sprouting: Once carrots are up, they require very little hands-on care—no staking, pruning, or training.

Reliable variety: Scarlet Nantes is a classic, dependable type that performs well for beginners and is well suited for fresh eating.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** About 1/4 inch (cover lightly)
- **Spacing / thinning:** Thin to 2–3 inches apart (closer spacing produces smaller carrots; wider spacing produces thicker roots)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–21 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 1–2 inches tall (thin in stages if needed)
- First harvest (baby carrots): 50–60 days
- **Full-size harvest:** 65–75 days

When to Plant

Carrots are a cool-season crop but grow well across much of the year. Plant in spring around your last frost window once soil is workable, and plant again for fall so roots develop as temperatures cool. Carrots tend to taste best when they grow steadily without heat stress.

How to Plant

Carrots are best direct sown. They dislike root disturbance, so avoiding transplanting leads to straighter roots and fewer problems.

Choose a location with good sun and decent drainage.

Prepare soil so it is loose and free of stones—this matters more for carrots than almost any other crop.

Break up clumps, remove rocks, and smooth the surface so seeds sit evenly.

Sprinkle seeds thinly in a shallow line, then cover lightly.

Gently press the soil for seed-to-soil contact without packing it down.

Important: Carrot seeds are small and slow to germinate. Keep the top layer of soil evenly moist until seedlings emerge.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Carrots need minimal watering once established, but consistency is critical early.

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and allow soil to dry Focus on preventing surface crusting while seeds are sprouting, as a dry crust can block seedlings.

Sun & Shade

Feeding (if applicable)

Keep the bed lightly weeded. Young carrots grow slowly at first and are easily outcompeted.

Avoid heavy feeding. Excess fertilizer promotes leafy tops rather than smooth roots. Compost mixed into the soil is usually sufficient.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Carrots do not regrow after pulling, but staggered harvesting extends the harvest period.

Pull baby carrots early, often starting with those removed during thinning.

Leave remaining carrots in the ground to continue sizing up.

If soil is firm, loosen gently before pulling to prevent snapping roots. Carrots do not need to be harvested all at once and can remain in the ground for a period, especially in cool weather.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Poor germination (nothing coming up):

Carrot germination can be slow—be patient.

Keep the soil surface evenly moist, not soggy.

If a crust forms, gently break the surface without digging deeply.

If repeated drying occurred, reseed a small section and maintain consistent moisture.

Forked or misshapen roots:

Usually caused by rocks, hard clods, or compacted soil.

Improve soil preparation and avoid disturbing roots once seedlings are growing.

Splitting roots:

Often caused by moisture swings from very dry to very wet conditions.

Use check-first watering to maintain steadier moisture.

Crowding / thin carrots:

Crowded roots compete underground and remain narrow.

Thin gently by snipping extras at soil level or pulling the smallest when soil is damp to reduce disturbance.

Think in terms of space for the root, not the leaves.

Pests (beginner-safe approach):

Inspect plants closely if foliage appears weak or damaged.

Use light netting or mesh to reduce insect pressure.

Keep the bed clean and weeded to limit pest hiding spots.

Quick Tips

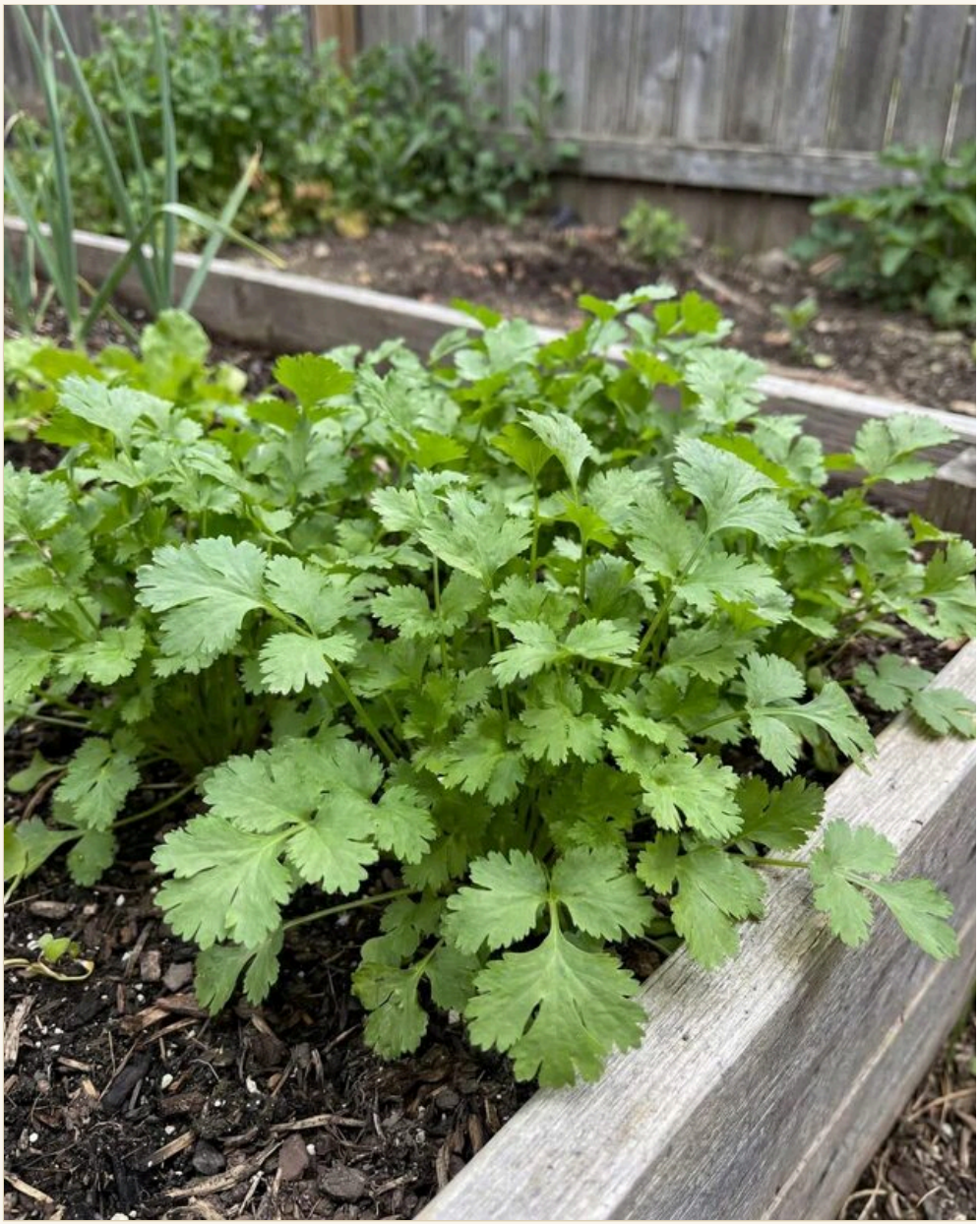
- Always direct sow—carrots do not transplant well.
- Keep the soil surface evenly moist until sprouts are clearly established.
- Thinning directly improves final root size.
- As warm weather approaches, harvest earlier rather than waiting for maximum size.

Mini Checklist

- Soil loosened thoroughly and cleared of rocks and clods
- Seeds direct sown at proper depth and covered lightly
- Soil surface kept consistently moist during germination
- Surface crusting monitored and gently broken if needed
- Seedlings thinned to give roots room to form
- Weeds controlled while carrots are small
- **Harvested in stages:** baby carrots first, full-size later

[#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	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING
Full Sun (8+ hours)	1/2 to 1 inch	12 inches / 3 feet
DAYS TO GERMINATION	**DAYS TO MATURITY**	
5–10 Days	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

Marketmore 76 Cucumber

Why This Is Easy

Disease-resistant workhorse: This variety resists several common cucumber diseases, including powdery mildew, mosaic virus, and scab, making it dependable for beginners and consistent through the season.

Classic slicer: Marketmore 76 produces straight, dark green cucumbers about 8–9 inches long, well suited for salads, sandwiches, and fresh eating.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/2 inch
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 12–18 inches apart. Space rows 5–6 feet apart to allow vines to spread.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 3–10 days (faster in warm soil)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have 2–3 true leaves
- **First harvest:** 58–68 days
- **Harvest window:** Several weeks of continuous picking with regular harvest
- **Frost note:** Cucumbers are frost-tender. Plant only after all danger of frost has passed.

When to Plant

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

Spring: Plant after your last frost date once soil has warmed to at least 70°F. Cold soil leads to poor germination and slow growth.

Summer: The main growing season. Cucumbers perform best between 70–85°F.

Fall: Not recommended, as cucumbers need consistent warmth throughout their life cycle.

Cold warning: Cucumbers cannot tolerate frost. Soil below 50°F slows growth and damages roots, so avoid planting too early.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is recommended, as cucumbers have sensitive roots and transplant poorly.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location with well-draining soil and work in generous compost. Cucumbers are heavy feeders.

Sow: Plant seeds 1/2 inch deep, spacing them about 6 inches apart at first.

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 12–18 inches apart.

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

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

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

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

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Water at the base of plants, not overhead. Wet foliage increases disease risk. Uneven watering can lead to misshapen or bitter fruit.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Heat:

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

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

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. Avoid wetting foliage when feeding.

Trellising (optional but helpful): Training vines upward saves space, improves airflow, keeps fruit clean and straight, and makes harvesting easier. If grown on the ground, mulch beneath vines.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Check Often: Once production starts, check plants every 1–2 days. Cucumbers grow quickly.

Size guide: Harvest Marketmore 76 at 6–9 inches for best texture and flavor. Smaller fruit are usually more tender.

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

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

Keep Picking: Regular 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 at least 70°F and avoid overwatering before emergence.

Flowers but no fruit (poor pollination):

Cause: Male flowers appear first, which is normal. Female flowers require pollination to set fruit.

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 concentrates near the stem end and under the skin.

Cucumber beetles:

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

Action: Use row covers early, hand-pick beetles, and keep the garden clean of debris. Marketmore 76 tolerates some beetle damage better than many varieties.

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 common in humid conditions.

Action: Although Marketmore 76 has good resistance, space plants properly, water at the base, remove affected leaves, and use trellising to improve airflow.

Quick Tips

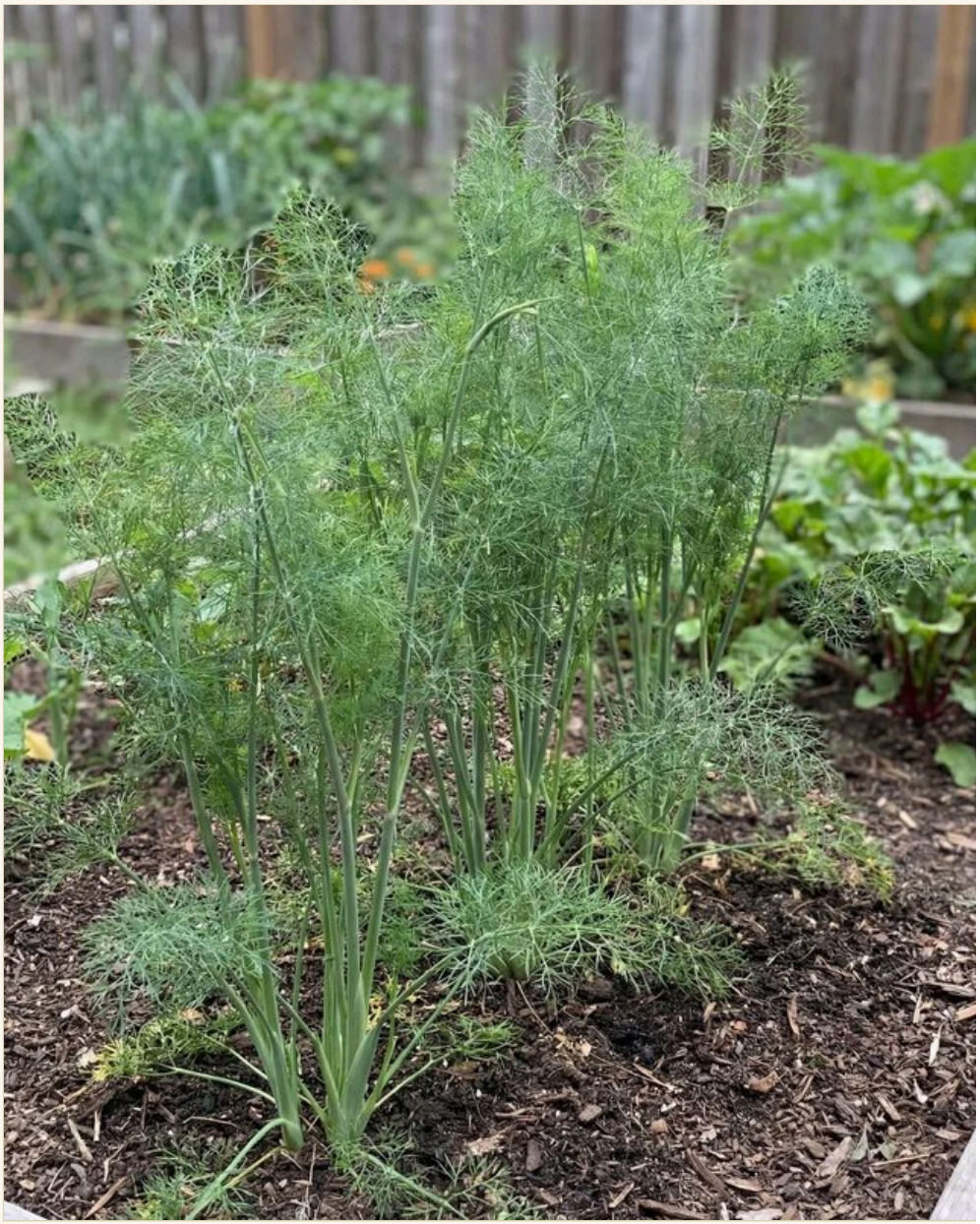
- Disease resistance makes this variety forgiving for beginners.
- Plant only in warm soil (at least 70°F).
- Harvest every 1–2 days once fruiting begins.
- Use a trellis when possible to improve plant health and ease harvesting.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost with soil at 70°F
- Seeds planted 1/2 inch deep
- Seedlings thinned to 12–18 inches apart
- Soil kept consistently moist and watered at the base
- Compost applied when vines began running
- Plants checked every 1–2 days during harvest
- Cucumbers harvested at 6–9 inches before yellowing
- 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

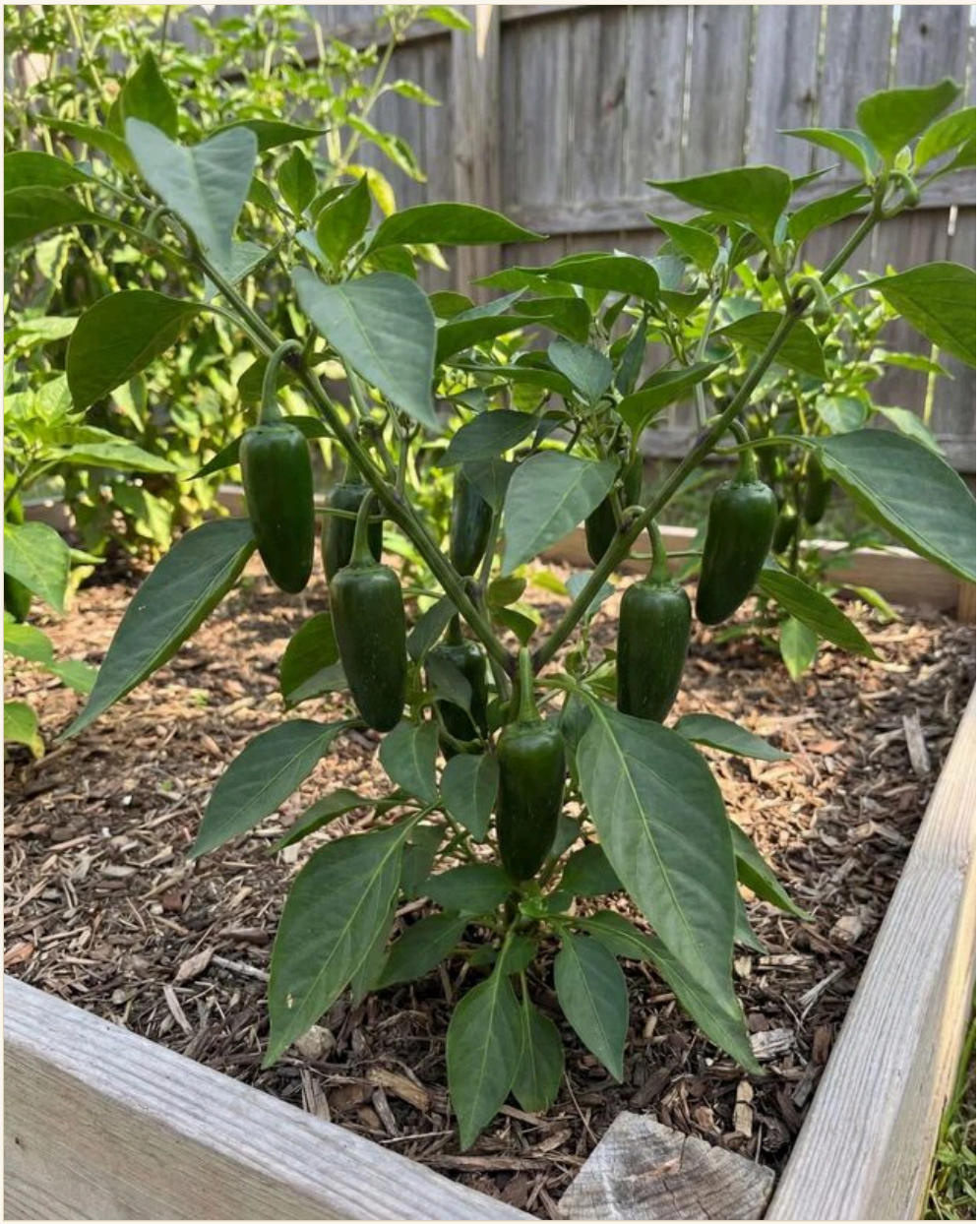
- Direct sow only—dill does not transplant well.
- Succession plant every 2–3 weeks for continuous leaf harvest.
- Plant seeds shallowly, as light aids germination.
- Bolting is part of the life cycle—use flowers and seeds rather than viewing it as a failure.

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

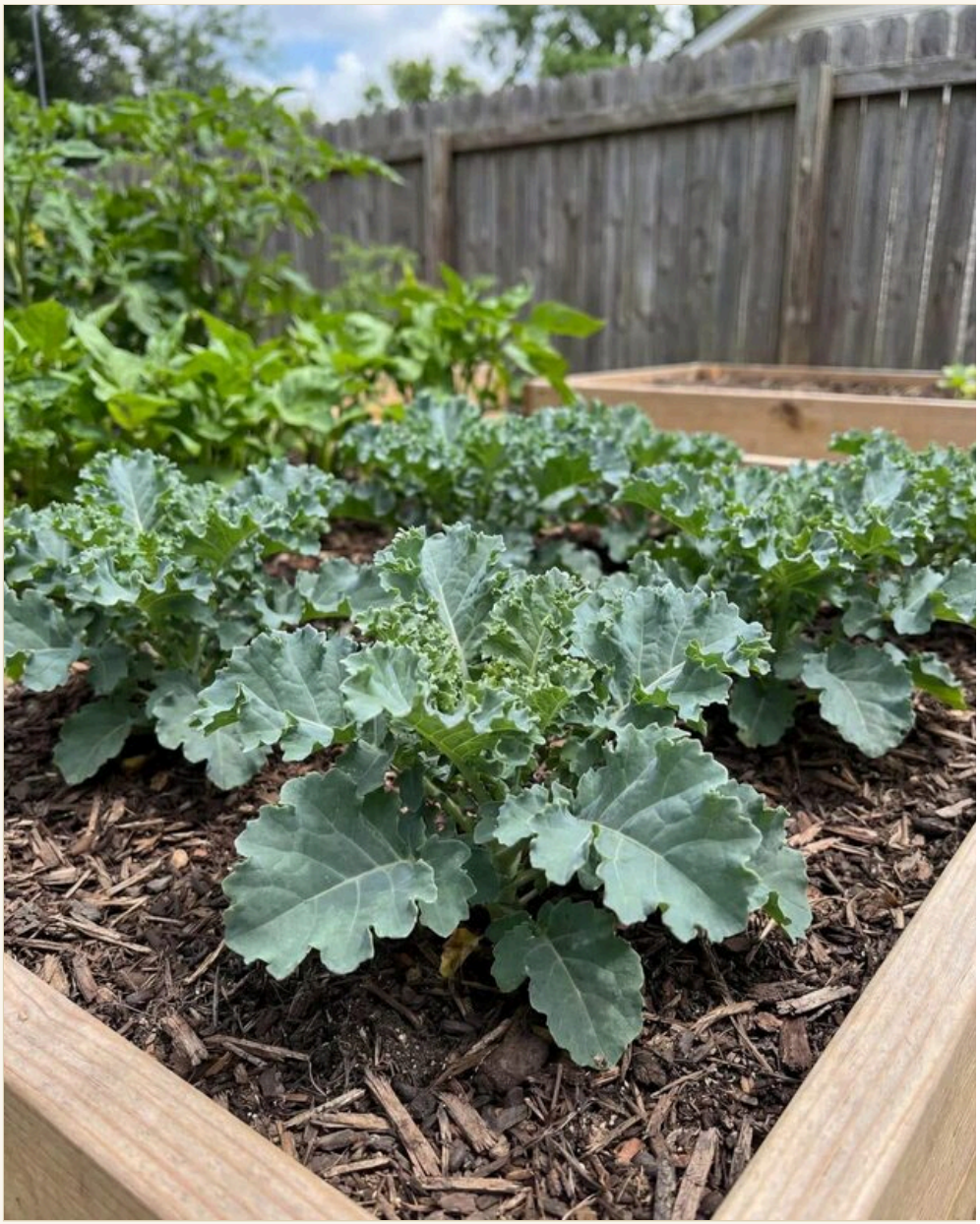
- Starting indoors or using transplants provides a strong head start.
- Wait for warm soil and nights before planting outdoors.
- Harvest frequently to keep plants productive.
- Handle peppers carefully—capsaicin can irritate skin and eyes.

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

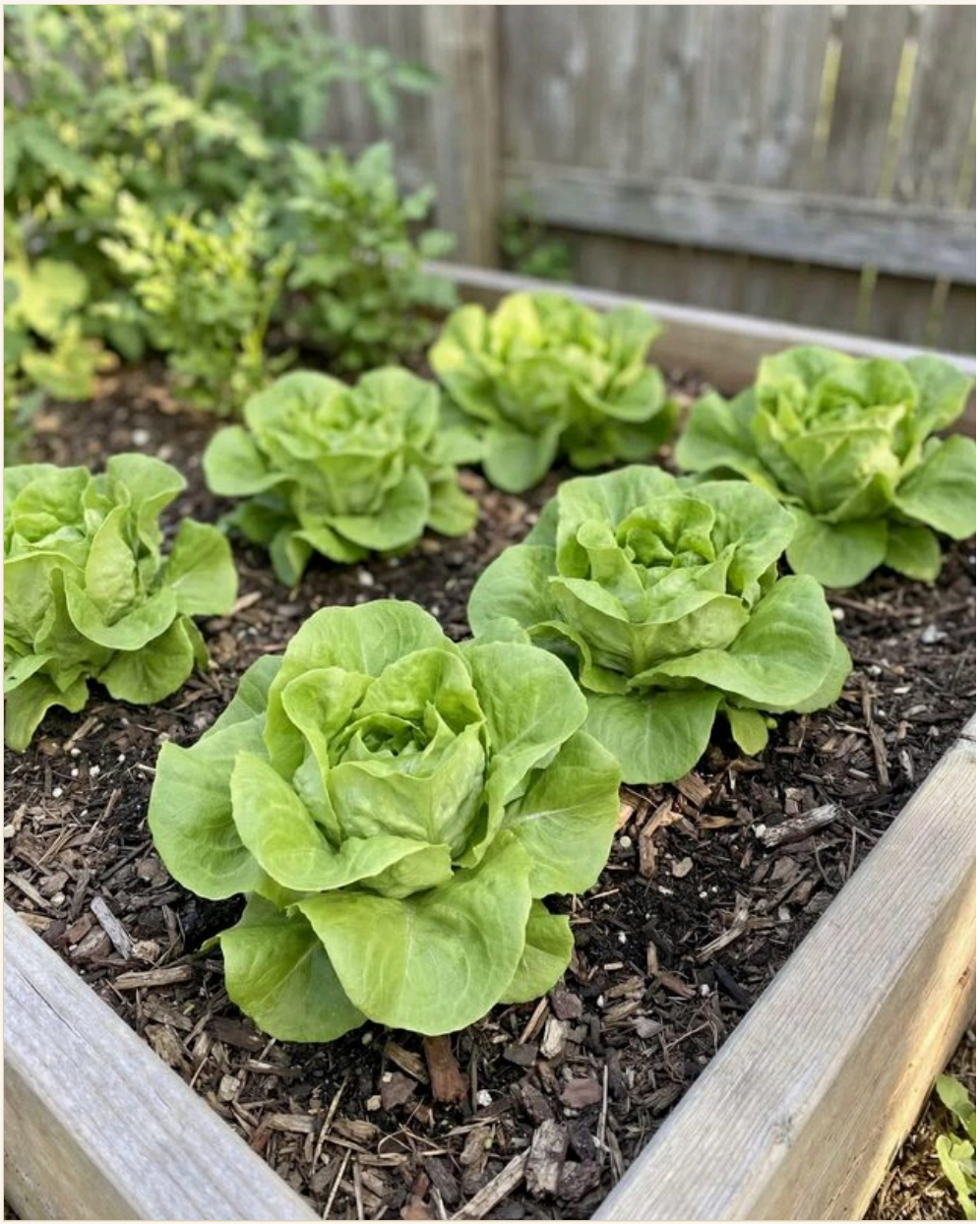
- Start harvesting once leaves are large enough to use—no need to wait for perfection.
- Always harvest outer leaves and leave the center growing.
- Cooler weather usually improves flavor.
- Regular harvesting keeps plants productive longer.

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

Lettuce – Buttercrunch



Why This Is Easy

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

Forgiving harvest style: Picking a few leaves at a time allows the plant to keep growing back using a cut-and-come-again approach.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/8 inch (seeds need a bit of light, so cover very lightly)
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 8–10 inches apart for full heads

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (faster in warm soil, slower in cool conditions)
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are about 2 inches tall
- **Baby leaf harvest:** 25–30 days
- **Full head harvest:** 55–65 days
- **Heat warning:** Quality declines and plants may bolt if temperatures consistently stay above 75–80°F

When to Plant

Lettuce is a cool-weather crop that thrives in spring and fall and struggles in summer heat.

Spring: Plant as soon as the ground is thawed and workable. Lettuce tolerates light frost well.

Fall: Plant in late summer as temperatures begin to cool. If soil is still hot, provide shade to protect seedlings.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is best because lettuce has delicate roots.

Prepare: Loosen the top layer of soil and break up large clumps.

Sow: Sprinkle seeds thinly along the row.

Cover: Lightly dust soil over the seeds, about the thickness of a coin. Seeds need a small amount of light to germinate.

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

Water: Mist gently. Heavy watering can wash seeds away.

Optional: Seeds can be started indoors 3–4 weeks before the last frost, but transplant carefully to avoid root damage.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Lettuce needs steady moisture to stay tender and sweet.

If the top inch of soil feels dry → Water gently at the base.

If damp → Wait.

Tip: Avoid letting soil dry out completely, as this leads to bitter leaves.

Sun & Shade

Sun control:

Cool weather (spring and fall): Full sun works well.

Warming weather: Partial shade improves quality. During heat waves, use shade cloth or plant near taller crops to block afternoon sun.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Usually unnecessary if soil was prepared with compost or good garden soil.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Buttercrunch lettuce can be harvested in two ways:

Cut-and-come-again (best for beginners): Once leaves reach 3–4 inches, snip outer leaves with scissors and leave the center intact. The plant will continue producing new leaves.

Whole head: Allow the plant to form a full, slightly firm head (about baseball to softball size), then cut the entire plant at the soil line.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bitter leaves:

Cause: Heat stress or uneven watering.

Fix: Water more consistently and provide shade. Harvest immediately once bitterness appears.

Bolting (tall center stalk):

What it is: The plant responds to heat by sending up a flower stalk, making leaves very bitter.

Fix: Harvest the entire plant as soon as bolting begins and compost the stalk.

Tiny holes in leaves:

Cause: Slugs or flea beetles.

Fix: Check leaf undersides, hand-pick slugs in the evening, and keep the area weed-free to reduce pest pressure.

Quick Tips

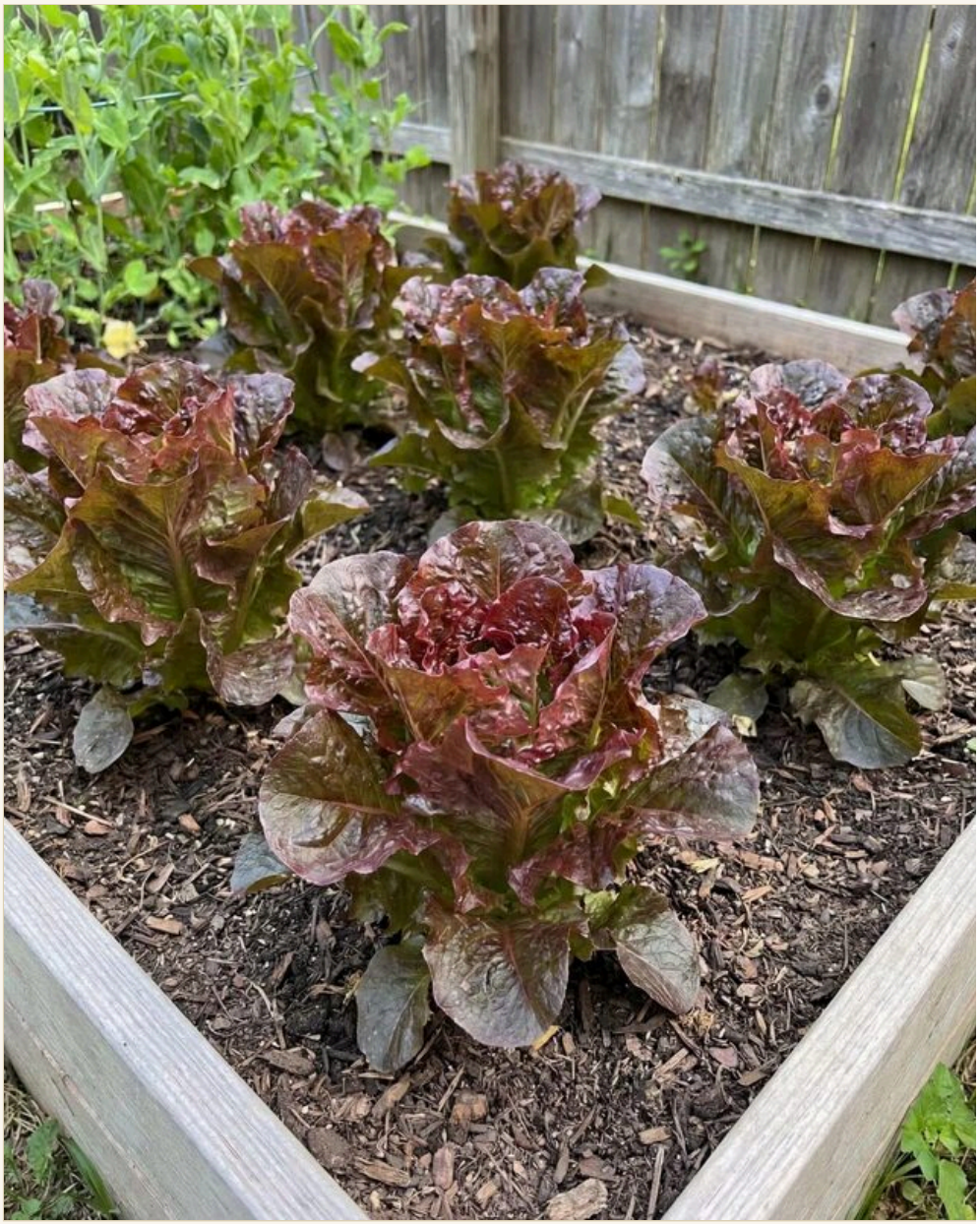
- **Succession planting:** Sow a small amount every 2 weeks for a steady salad supply rather than one large harvest.
- **Cool-down trick:** For late-summer sowing, rinsing seeds in cold water and drying them before planting can help improve germination.
- **Morning harvest:** Pick leaves early in the day when they are crispest.

Mini Checklist

- Soil loosened and free of large clumps
- Seeds sown very shallow and lightly covered
- Soil kept consistently moist, not soggy
- Seedlings thinned to proper spacing
- Leaves checked for slugs if holes appear
- Outer leaves harvested regularly for early salads

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Lettuce – Cimarron Red



Why This Is Easy

Beginner-friendly variety: Cimarron Red is well known for being slow to bolt, meaning it tolerates warmth better than many lettuces without quickly turning bitter.

Flexible harvest options: You can harvest tender baby leaves early or allow the plant to form a full, deep-red head.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/8–1/4 inch (cover very lightly; seeds need some light to germinate)
- **Spacing:** Thin seedlings to 8–12 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings are 2–3 inches tall
- **Baby leaf harvest:** 21–30 days
- **Full head harvest:** 50–70 days
- **Heat note:** Although more heat-tolerant than most lettuces, quality declines if temperatures consistently exceed 80°F

When to Plant

Lettuce is a cool-weather crop, and Cimarron Red is slightly more forgiving if planting runs late.

Spring: Plant as soon as the soil is workable and no longer frozen.

Fall: Plant in late summer. This variety tolerates lingering warmth while establishing and produces well as temperatures cool in autumn.

How to Plant

Direct sowing gives the best results.

Prepare: Smooth the soil surface and break up hard clumps.

Sow: Sprinkle seeds thinly along the row.

Cover: Lightly dust soil over the seeds. Do not bury them deeply.

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

Water: Mist lightly. Heavy watering can wash seeds away.

Optional: Seeds may be started indoors 3–4 weeks before the last frost, but transplant carefully to avoid disturbing roots.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Steady moisture keeps leaves crisp and mild.

If the top inch of soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

Tip: Uneven watering is a common cause of bitter lettuce.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Shade:

Cool weather: Full sun helps deepen red coloration.

Hot spells: Provide afternoon shade or plant near taller vegetables for protection.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Compost mixed into the soil at planting is usually sufficient.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Cut-and-come-again: When leaves reach 3–4 inches, snap or cut outer leaves near the base.

Save the center: Leave the central rosette intact so the plant continues producing leaves for weeks.

Full head: For a romaine-style head, wait until the plant feels full and leafy, then cut the entire plant at the soil line.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Bolting (going to seed):

Signs: The center stretches upward and leaves turn bitter.

Fix: Harvest the whole plant immediately. Once bolting starts, it cannot be reversed.

Holes in leaves:

Cause: Slugs or snails are the most common cause.

Fix: Check plants at dusk or dawn and hand-pick pests.

Yellowing leaves:

Cause: Often caused by overwatering or poor drainage.

Fix: Check soil moisture before watering and ensure beds or containers drain well.

Crowding:

Issue: Plants appear weak or may rot near the base.

Fix: Thin plants so air can move freely between them.

Quick Tips

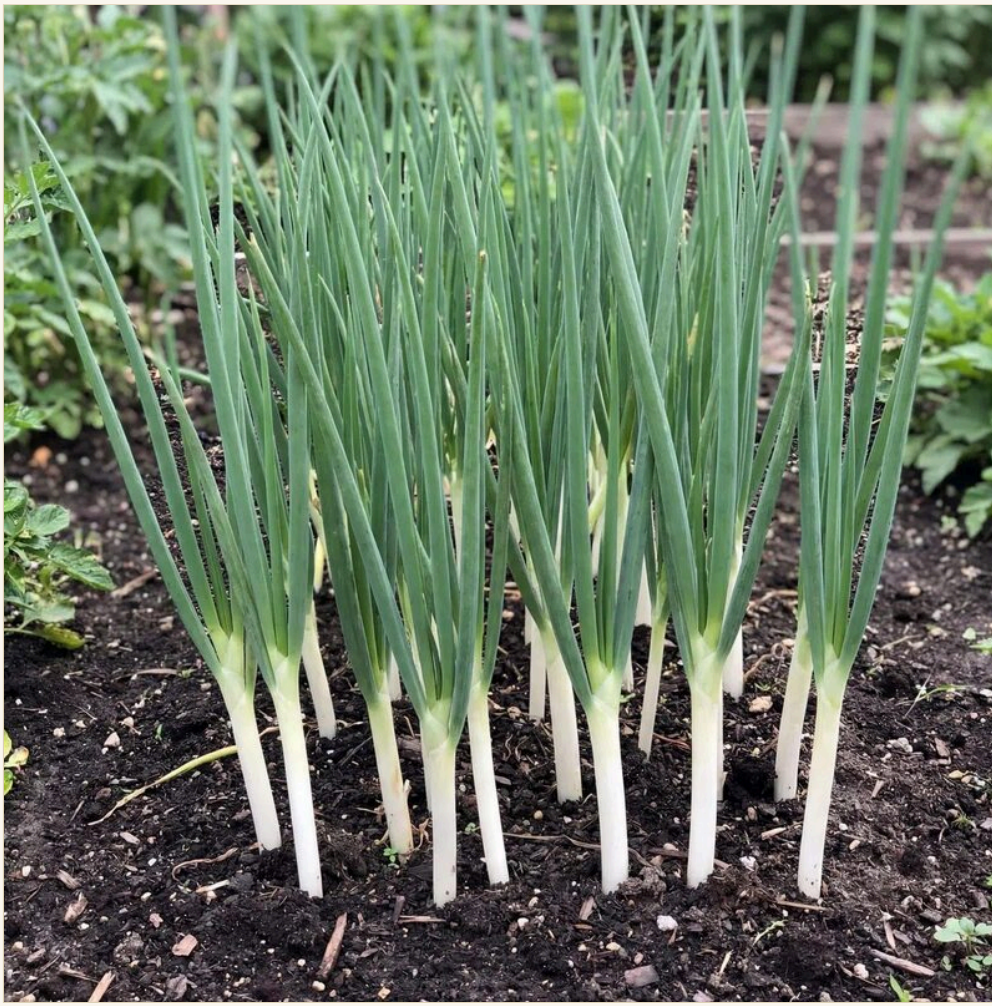
- Red color often deepens with good sun exposure.
- Harvest in the cool morning for the best texture.
- Mulch around plants to keep roots cool and moisture steady.

Mini Checklist

- Soil surface smoothed and clump-free
- Seeds sown very shallow and lightly covered
- Soil kept consistently moist
- Seedlings thinned to 8–12 inches apart
- Plants checked for slugs if holes appear
- Outer leaves harvested first

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Tokyo Long White Scallions



Why This Is Easy

Cut-and-come-again harvest: Snip the green tops and they regrow, allowing multiple harvests from one planting.

Flexible and low-maintenance: Scallions tolerate cool weather, grow well in small spaces or containers, and rarely suffer serious pest problems. A short row can provide fresh green onions as needed.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/4 inch
- **Spacing:** 1–2 inches apart (no thinning required, or thin for thicker stalks). Rows spaced about 12 inches apart.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (faster in warm soil, slower in cool soil)
- **Young scallion harvest:** 30–40 days (tender, mild, about 6–8 inches tall)
- **Full-size harvest:** 60–80 days (16–18 inches tall with thicker white stalks)
- **Cut-and-come-again:** Cut greens about 1 inch above the soil line and they will regrow for additional harvests

When to Plant

Scallions are cool-weather crops that tolerate light frost and offer flexible planting windows.

Spring: Plant 4–6 weeks before your last frost date, once soil can be worked and reaches about 45°F. Ideal soil temperature is 60–85°F.

Summer: Plant for fall harvest. Scallions tolerate some heat but grow best between 55–80°F.

Fall: In mild climates, plant in fall for winter or early spring harvest.

Succession planting: Sow new seeds every 2–4 weeks for a steady supply throughout the season.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is simple and effective.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location (at least 6 hours of sun) with well-draining soil. Work in compost if soil quality is poor.

Sow: Scatter seeds in a narrow band or row, about 1/2 inch apart, and cover with 1/4 inch of soil. Alternatively, plant in clumps by dropping 8–10 seeds per hole, 1/4 inch deep, with holes spaced 3–4 inches apart.

Water: Water gently after planting and keep soil consistently moist until sprouts appear.

Thin (optional): Thinning is not required, but thinning to 2–3 inches apart produces thicker, more leek-like stalks.

Starting Indoors (Optional)

Start seeds indoors 8–10 weeks before the last frost.

Transplant seedlings outdoors 4–6 weeks before the last frost, when they are 4–6 inches tall.

Harden off seedlings for 7–10 days before transplanting.

Container Growing

Scallions grow well in containers due to their shallow roots.

Use a pot at least 6 inches deep with drainage holes.

Plant in clumps of 8–10 seeds, spaced 3–4 inches apart.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering: Scallions have shallow roots and need steady moisture.

If the soil surface feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

Tip: Because roots are shallow, check moisture often in hot or dry weather. Avoid both drying out and waterlogged soil.

Sun & Shade

Sun & Temperature:

Full sun (6–8 hours) is ideal, though scallions tolerate partial shade.

Best growth occurs between 55–80°F.

Plants tolerate light frost, making them well suited for early spring and fall.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Scallions are light feeders. If growth appears slow or leaves look pale, apply a balanced liquid fertilizer or fish emulsion once or twice during the season. A light feeding after cut-and-come-again harvest encourages regrowth.

Weeding: Keep beds weeded, as scallions compete poorly with weeds. Weed gently to avoid disturbing shallow roots.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

When to Harvest

Young and tender: 30–40 days, when plants reach 6–8 inches tall.

Full size: 60–80 days, when plants are 12–18 inches tall and about 1/2 inch thick at the base.

Harvest at any size that suits your needs.

How to Harvest

Whole plant: Gently pull plants or loosen soil with a fork and lift.

Cut-and-come-again: Cut green tops about 1 inch above the soil. Leave roots and the white base in place so plants regrow. Apply a light feeding after cutting to support regrowth.

Storage

Use fresh for best flavor.

Store unwashed scallions in the refrigerator, wrapped in a damp paper towel, for up to one week.

Chopped greens can be frozen for longer storage.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

Cause: Soil too cold or too dry.

Action: Keep soil evenly moist. Germination can take longer in cool conditions, so patience is important.

Thin, weak growth:

Cause: Insufficient sun, poor soil, or overcrowding.

Action: Ensure at least 6 hours of sun, feed lightly, and thin if plants are very crowded.

Thrips:

Cause: Small insects that create silvery streaks or blotches on leaves.

Action: Rinse plants with a strong spray of water. Use insecticidal soap if needed. Keep beds clean and weed-free.

Onion maggots:

Cause: Larvae feeding at the base of plants.

Action: Remove affected plants and discard the base. Rotate crops to avoid repeat problems.

Slugs:

Cause: Feeding at night in damp conditions.

Action: Hand-pick in the early morning or evening. Keep the area clean and free of debris.

Quick Tips

- Sow every 2–4 weeks for continuous harvest.
- Cut greens instead of pulling entire plants to extend production.
- Scallions are well suited to containers and small spaces.
- Their onion scent can help deter some garden pests.

Mini Checklist

- Planted early in spring or succession-planted through the season
- Seeds sown 1/4 inch deep
- Soil kept consistently moist until sprouts emerged
- Plants spaced 1–2 inches apart or grown in clumps
- Harvesting at young or full size as needed
- Cutting greens above the soil line for regrowth
- Light feeding applied after cutting to encourage new growth

[#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

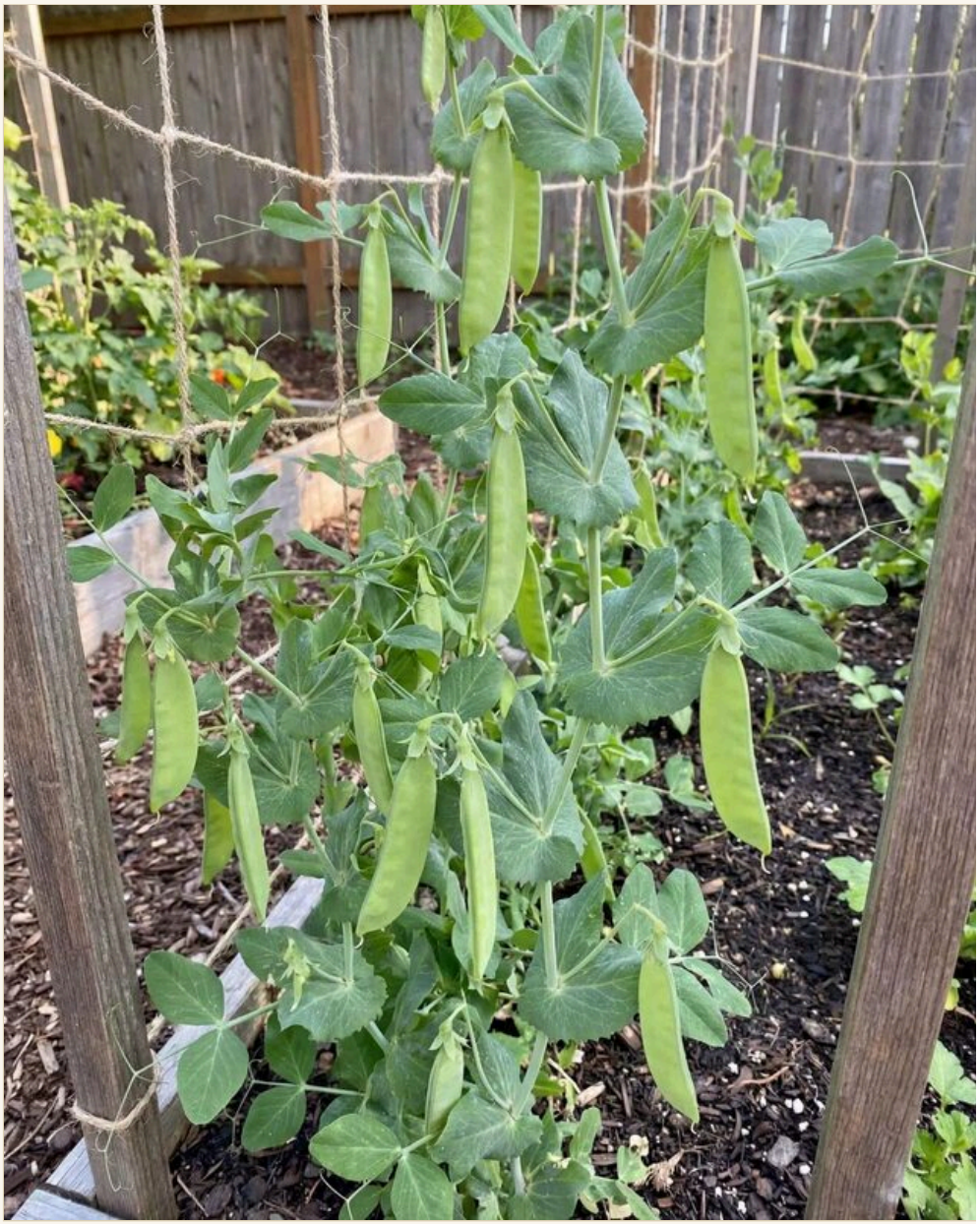
- Pre-soak seeds to speed slow germination.
- Expect a 2–4 week sprout window and remain patient.
- Harvest outer stems first to keep plants productive.
- Label rows to avoid disturbing slow-emerging seedlings.

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

Peas – Oregon Sugar Pod II



Why This Is Easy

Perfect cool-weather crop: Peas thrive in early spring when many vegetables are still waiting to be planted.

Disease-resistant and productive: Oregon Sugar Pod II resists powdery mildew, fusarium wilt, and common pea viruses. Compact vines (28–36 inches) produce generous yields of double pods.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1–1½ inches
- **Spacing:** 2–3 inches apart, with rows spaced 18–24 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (faster in warmer soil, slower in cold soil)
- **First harvest:** 60–68 days
- **Harvest window:** 2–3 weeks with regular picking
- **Snow pea note:** Harvest pods when they are flat and about 4 inches long, before peas inside begin to swell

When to Plant

Peas are cool-weather crops that love spring and struggle in heat.

Spring (main season): Plant 2–4 weeks before your last frost date, as soon as soil can be worked. Peas tolerate light frost and grow best at 55–65°F.

Soil temperature: Seeds germinate in soil as cool as 40°F, but 50–70°F is ideal. Cold soil means slower germination.

Fall crop: In mild climates, plant again in late summer for a fall harvest, about 8–10 weeks before the first expected frost.

Heat warning: Peas stop producing when temperatures consistently exceed 80°F. Time planting so harvest finishes before summer heat.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is recommended—peas do not transplant well.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location (6–8 hours of sun). Work compost into well-draining soil. Peas improve soil by fixing nitrogen, so rich fertilizer is unnecessary.

Sow: Plant seeds 1–1½ inches deep and 2–3 inches apart, either in rows or wide bands.

Water: Water thoroughly after planting and keep soil lightly moist until sprouts appear.

Support: Install a trellis, netting, or short stakes at planting time. Though vines are short, support improves airflow and makes harvesting easier.

Protect seedlings: Birds often target young pea shoots—cover with netting or row cover until plants are established.

Replanting Tip If germination is uneven, replant immediately. New seedlings catch up quickly.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering:

If soil feels dry 1 inch down → Water

If damp → Wait

Tip: In cool spring weather, rainfall may provide enough moisture. Avoid overwatering, which can encourage disease.

Sun & Temperature

Full sun (6–8 hours) is ideal.

Best growth occurs at 55–65°F.

Production declines once temperatures exceed 80°F—this is normal for peas.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Peas are legumes and fix their own nitrogen. Too much fertilizer leads to leafy growth with few pods. Compost at planting is usually sufficient.

Weeding: Keep beds weed-free, especially early on. Weed gently—pea roots are shallow.

Harvest (Snow Peas)

When to Harvest

Harvest pods when they are flat, tender, and about 4 inches long.

Pick before peas inside swell; overmature pods become tough and signal plants to stop producing.

How to Harvest

Use two hands: Hold the vine with one hand and pick with the other, or use scissors. Vines are fragile.

Harvest every 1–2 days during peak production to keep plants producing.

Eating

Snow peas are eaten whole—pod and all.

Oregon Sugar Pod II is stringless and excellent raw, lightly steamed, or in stir-fries.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn't sprout or rotted:

Cause: Cold, wet soil.

Action: Wait for soil to reach at least 45–50°F. Avoid overwatering and replant if needed.

Flowers but no pods:

Cause: High temperatures above 80°F.

Action: Plant earlier in spring or grow as a fall crop in warm climates.

Powdery mildew:

Cause: Fungal disease during warm days and cool nights.

Action: This variety is resistant, but improve airflow with spacing and trellising. Water at the base and remove affected leaves if needed.

Aphids:

Cause: Common pest as weather warms.

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

Yellow leaves or stunted growth:

Cause: Root stress, disease, or aphid-spread viruses.

Action: Remove severely affected plants and rotate crops—avoid planting peas in the same spot for three years.

Bird damage:

Cause: Birds feeding on seedlings.

Action: Use bird netting or row cover until plants are 6 inches tall.

Quick Tips

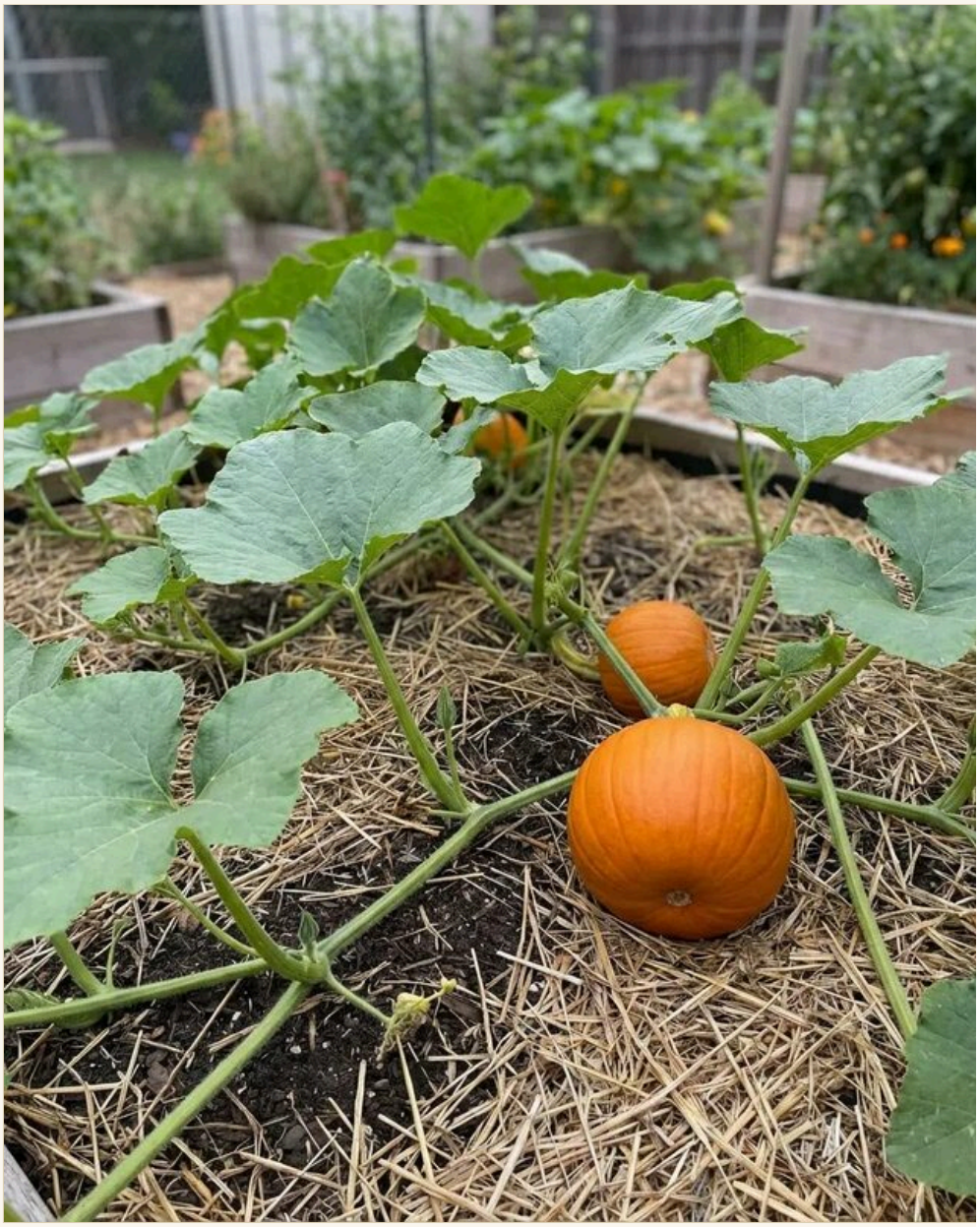
- Plant early—peas thrive in cool weather.
- Even short vines benefit from support.
- Harvest often to keep plants producing.
- Pick pods while flat, before peas swell.

Mini Checklist

- Planted 2–4 weeks before last frost
- Seeds planted 1–1½ inches deep and spaced properly
- Trellis or support installed at planting
- Seedlings protected from birds
- Soil kept moist but not soggy
- Pods harvested flat at about 4 inches
- Picking every 1–2 days during peak production
- Using two hands or scissors to protect vines

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Pumpkin – Sugar Pie



Why This Is Easy

Classic pie pumpkin: Small (5–8 lb) fruits with sweet, fine-grained flesh—excellent for pies, soups, and roasting. Much better eating quality than carving pumpkins.

Manageable size: Vines and fruits are smaller than giant pumpkins. Still needs space, but won't overwhelm a typical garden.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** 3–4 feet between plants; rows 5–6 feet apart (vines can spread 10–15 feet)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days (best with warm soil, 70°F+)
- **First harvest:** 90–100 days
- **Harvest timing:** Before first frost, when rind is hard and stem begins to dry
- **Curing:** 1–2 weeks after harvest for best storage

When to Plant

Pumpkins are warm-weather crops with zero frost tolerance.

Direct sow outdoors: After all frost danger has passed and soil reaches at least 70°F (often 2–4 weeks after last frost).

Start indoors (short seasons): 2–4 weeks before last frost in biodegradable pots. Transplant only after soil is warm.

Timing for fall harvest: Count back ~100 days from your first expected fall frost to find the latest safe planting date.

How to Plant

Direct Sowing (Recommended)

Prepare: Choose the sunniest spot. Pumpkins need space and rich soil. Work compost or well-rotted manure into the bed.

Create hills (optional): Form mounds ~12 inches across and 3–4 inches high, spaced 4–6 feet apart. Hills warm faster and improve drainage.

Sow: Plant 2–3 seeds per hill, 1 inch deep. Thin to the strongest seedling after sprouting.

Water: Water well after planting and keep soil evenly moist until sprouts appear.

Starting Indoors (Short Growing Seasons)

Start 2–4 weeks before last frost—no earlier.

Use biodegradable pots so roots aren’t disturbed.

Plant seeds 1 inch deep; keep warm (70–85°F).

Transplant only after frost danger has passed and soil is warm. Handle gently.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic

Check-First Watering:

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

If damp → Wait

Tip: Avoid overhead watering to reduce disease. As pumpkins near maturity, slightly reduce watering to prevent watery flesh.

Sun & Temperature

Full sun (6–8 hours minimum) is essential.

Pumpkins thrive in warm weather (70°F+).

Frost kills plants—harvest before the first hard frost.

Feeding (if applicable)

Feeding: Pumpkins are heavy feeders.

Enrich soil with compost or manure at planting.

Side-dress with compost or balanced fertilizer when vines begin to run.

Switch to a low-nitrogen fertilizer once flowers appear (too much nitrogen = leaves, fewer fruits).

Mulching: Straw or leaf mulch conserves moisture, suppresses weeds, and keeps fruit off wet soil.

Harvest

When to Harvest

Color: Fully orange (or mature variety color).

Rind test: Skin resists a fingernail and doesn't puncture easily.

Stem: Dry and corky, not green.

Timing: Harvest before the first hard frost.

How to Harvest

Cut the stem with a sharp knife or pruners, leaving 3–4 inches attached.

Don't carry pumpkins by the stem—it can snap and invite rot.

Handle gently to avoid bruising.

Curing & Storage

Cure in a warm, dry place (80–85°F) with good airflow for 1–2 weeks.

Store in a cool, dry area (50–55°F). Properly cured Sugar Pie pumpkins can store 3–5 months.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds didn’t sprout:

Cause: Soil too cold or wet.

Action: Wait for soil to reach 70°F. Don’t rush planting.

Lots of flowers but no fruit:

Cause: Pollination timing—male flowers appear first.

Action: Be patient. Encourage bees or hand-pollinate in the morning using a small brush.

Powdery mildew:

Cause: Common late-season fungal disease.

Action: Water at the base, improve airflow, remove badly affected leaves. Usually cosmetic—fruit is still fine.

Squash vine borers:

Cause: Larvae bore into stems, causing sudden wilting.

Action: Check for frass at stem bases. Remove borers if found and mound soil over the wound. Prevent with row cover early and crop rotation.

Squash bugs:

Cause: Sap-sucking insects.

Action: Crush egg clusters, hand-pick adults, keep garden debris-free.

Fruit rotting on soil:

Cause: Constant moisture beneath fruit.

Action: Place straw, cardboard, or a board under pumpkins.

Quick Tips

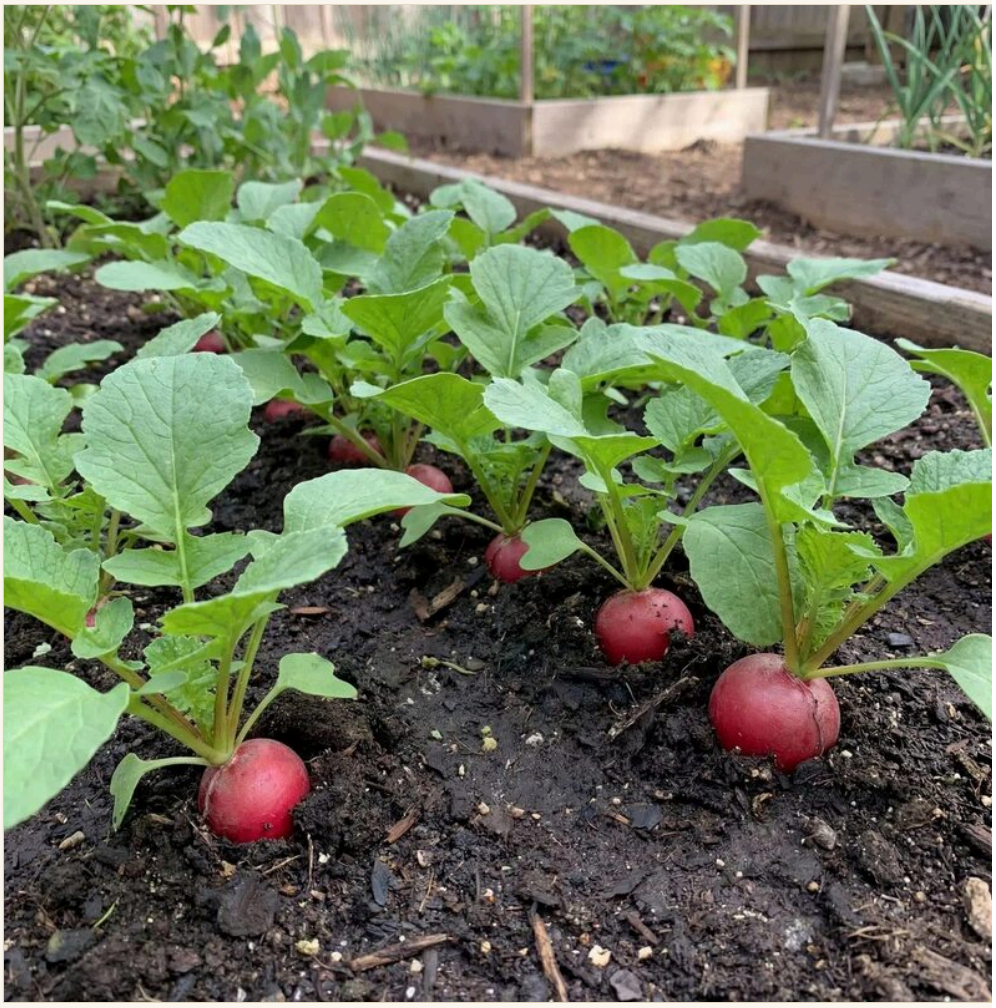
- Wait for warm soil—70°F+ is key.
- **Plan space:** Vines spread 10–15 feet.
- Hand-pollinate if fruit set is poor.
- Cure pumpkins before storage for longest shelf life.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost with soil at 70°F
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep; thinned to strongest seedling
- Spaced 3–4 feet apart with wide rows
- Full sun location chosen
- Soil enriched with compost/manure
- Deep watering at the base; mulched under fruit
- Harvested when rind is hard and stem is dry
- Stem cut with 3–4 inches attached
- Cured 1–2 weeks before storage

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Radish – Cherry Belle



Why This Is Easy

One of the fastest confidence crops: quick sprouting and a very fast harvest cycle.

Simple care: direct sow, keep moisture steady, and harvest on time.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** ½ inch
- **Spacing / thinning:** Sow closely, then thin to 1–2 inches apart

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 3–7 days
- **When to thin:** As soon as seedlings are about 1–2 inches tall (don’t delay)
- **Harvest window:** 21–30 days (harvest promptly for best texture and mild flavor)

When to Plant

Radishes are a cool-weather crop.

Best results usually come in spring and again as temperatures cool.

In warm weather, radishes become spicy faster and turn pithy if left too long.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is standard—radishes do not transplant well.

Choose a sunny spot with well-draining soil.

Loosen and smooth the soil surface so seedlings can emerge easily.

Scatter seeds lightly, cover to the proper depth, and gently press the soil for good contact.

For a steadier harvest:

Plant small amounts at intervals instead of all at once.

If sprouts are patchy:

Don’t panic.

Re-sow seeds in empty gaps and keep the surface evenly moist so new seedlings can catch up.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Radishes perform best with fast, steady growth.

Check-first watering:

If soil feels dry → Water

If damp → Wait

If soggy → Stop and let it dry

Steady moisture keeps roots crisp and prevents cracking or pithiness.

Sun & Shade

Choose a sunny location.

In warm conditions, radishes become spicy more quickly and lose quality if harvest is delayed.

Feeding (if applicable)

Keep weeds controlled—radishes dislike competition.

Avoid heavy nitrogen feeding, which encourages leaves instead of roots. Compost mixed into the soil is usually sufficient.

Harvest

Harvest timing matters more for radishes than almost any other root crop.

Check early and harvest as soon as roots reach a usable size.

Waiting too long leads to pithy texture and stronger heat.

Pull gently; loosen firm soil first to avoid snapping roots.

For ongoing harvests:

Plant in small batches and harvest each batch on time.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Pithy, spongy, or overly hot roots:

Usually caused by heat stress or late harvest.

Fix: Harvest earlier, keep moisture steady, and grow in cooler weather.

Cracking roots:

Often from moisture swings (very dry followed by very wet).

Fix: Use check-first watering and avoid extreme swings.

Lots of leaves, tiny roots:

Common causes are crowding and excess nitrogen.

Fix: Thin properly and keep feeding light.

Flea beetle “shot holes” in leaves:

Small round holes in foliage.

Fix: Rinse leaves with water or use light netting to prevent insect access.

Patchy sprouts:

Often from dry surface soil, crusting, or uneven moisture.

Fix: Keep the surface evenly moist and gently loosen crusted soil so sprouts can emerge.

Quick Tips

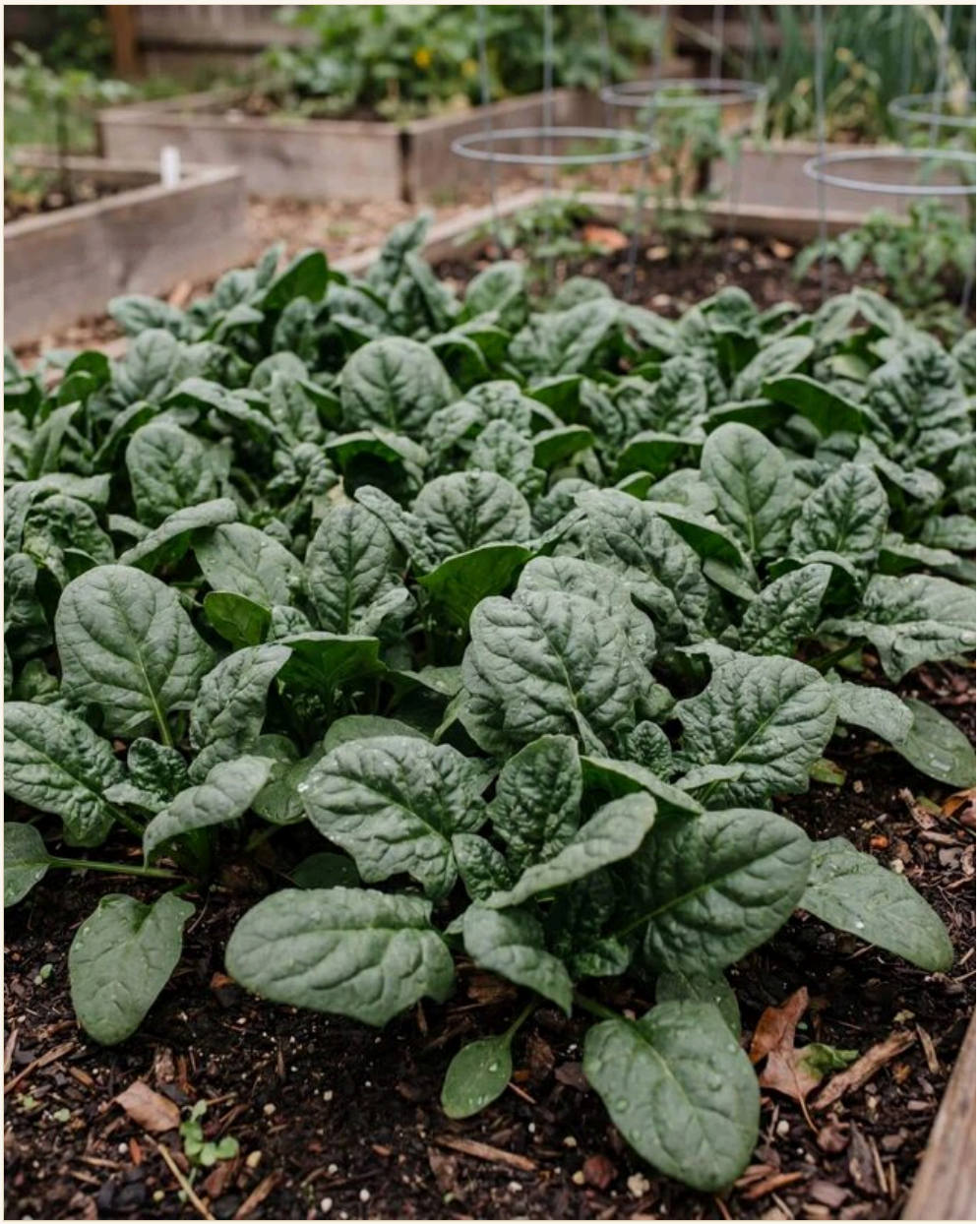
- Direct sow and keep the soil surface moist until sprouts are clearly up.
- Thin early so roots have space to form.
- Harvest on time—waiting “just a bit longer” leads to pithy radishes.
- In warming weather, harvest earlier rather than aiming for maximum size.

Mini Checklist

- Direct sow seeds (no transplanting)
- Cover at the correct depth and press soil gently
- Use check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Thin seedlings so roots have room
- Keep weeds controlled while plants are small
- Watch for flea beetle damage and use light cover if needed
- Harvest promptly for crisp, mild radishes

[#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

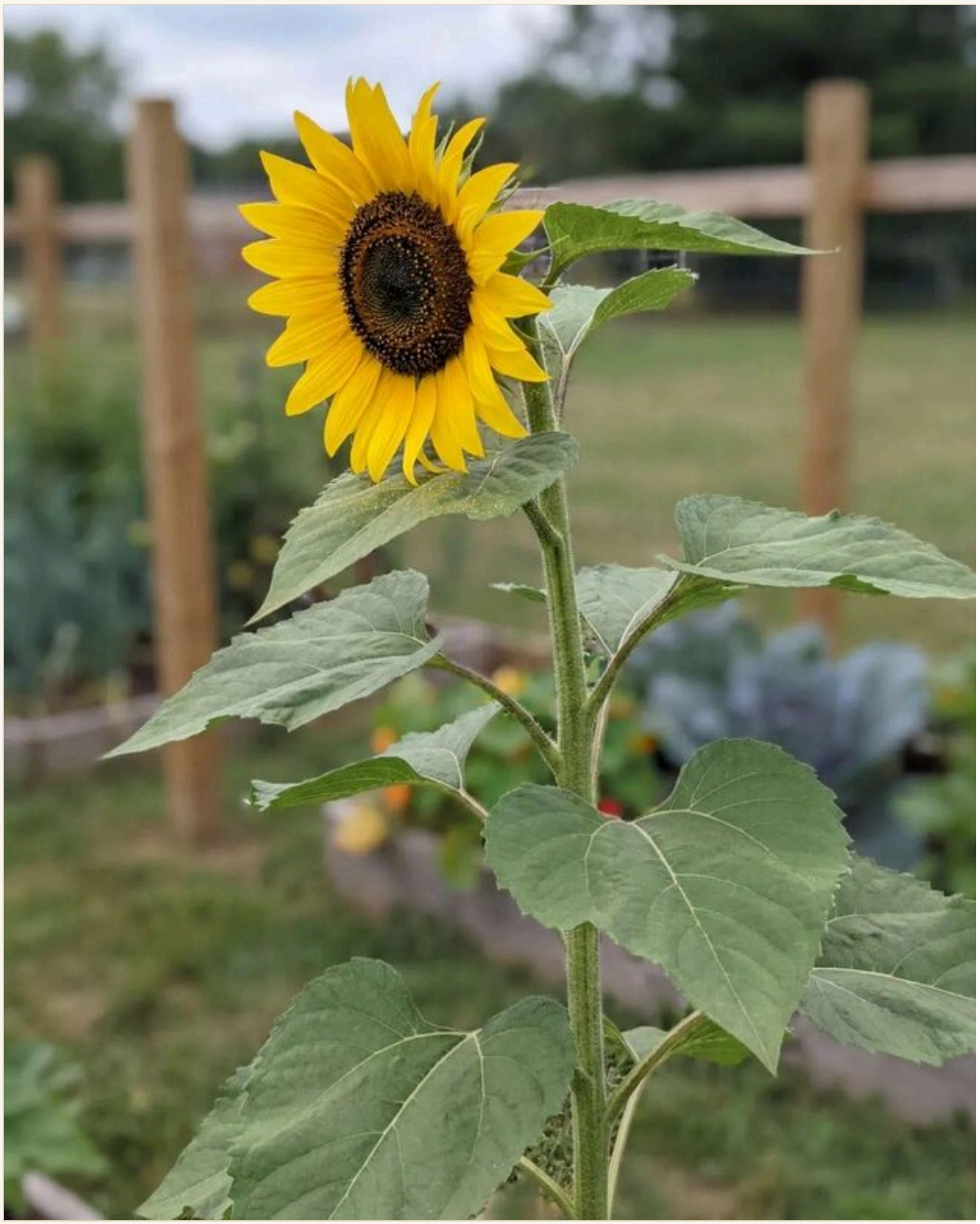
- **Refrigerator trick:** For late-summer planting, chill seed packets in the fridge for about a week before sowing to improve germination.
- **Succession planting:** Sow a short row every 2 weeks in spring for steady harvests.
- **Freeze extras:** Blanch leaves for 1 minute and freeze for later use.

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

Sunflowers – Large Grey Stripe



Why This Is Easy

One of the easiest plants to grow from seed: Large seeds, fast germination, and dramatic results make sunflowers especially satisfying (and popular with kids).

Low maintenance once established: Plants tolerate drought well, have relatively few pest issues, and produce edible seeds you can harvest and roast.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** 18–24 inches apart (wider spacing produces larger flower heads)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **First blooms:** 80–100 days
- **Seed harvest:** 30–45 days after blooming, when the back of the flower head turns brown
- **Height:** 8–12 feet tall with flower heads 10–14 inches across

When to Plant

Sunflowers are warm-weather plants. They need warmth to germinate and grow, but are adaptable once established.

Direct sow outdoors: After the last frost, when soil temperature reaches about 70°F. This is usually 1–2 weeks after your last frost date.

For continuous blooms: Sow new seeds every 2–3 weeks through early summer.

Starting indoors (optional): Start 2–4 weeks before last frost, but sunflowers prefer direct sowing because their long taproots dislike disturbance.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is strongly recommended. Sunflowers grow quickly and transplant poorly.

Direct Sowing (Recommended)

Choose your spot: Full sun is essential—at least 6–8 hours daily. Plant on the north side of the garden so tall plants don't shade others. Consider wind exposure; nearby fences or structures provide helpful shelter.

Prepare soil: Sunflowers aren't fussy, but loose, well-drained soil supports strong root growth. Compost improves results but isn't required.

Sow seeds: Plant 1 inch deep, about 6 inches apart. After sprouting, thin to 18–24 inches apart.

Protect from critters: Birds and small animals often dig up seeds. Cover planting areas with netting, row cover, or wire until seedlings are a few inches tall.

Water: Water well after planting and keep soil moist until sprouts appear.

Starting Indoors (Short Seasons Only)

Start only 2–4 weeks before last frost—sunflowers grow fast and become rootbound quickly.

Use biodegradable pots that can be planted directly into the soil.

Transplant carefully after the last frost, handling roots gently.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering keeps plants healthy without overdoing it.

Seedlings: Keep soil moist until plants are about 6 inches tall.

Established plants: Water deeply once or twice a week during dry periods. The most critical watering window is about 20 days before and after flowering.

Tip: Water at the base, not overhead. Wet foliage can encourage disease.

Sun & Shade

Full sun (6–8 hours minimum) is essential.

Young sunflowers track the sun across the sky; mature flower heads naturally face east.

Feeding (if applicable)

Sunflowers are not heavy feeders. Average soil is usually sufficient.

For larger flowers, work compost into the soil at planting or side-dress with a balanced fertilizer when plants reach about 1 foot tall.

Avoid excess nitrogen, which promotes leaf growth at the expense of flower size.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

You can grow sunflowers for cut flowers or for edible seeds.

For Cut Flowers

When to cut: When petals are just beginning to open.

How to cut: Use clean, sharp scissors and cut at a slight angle, leaving 1–2 feet of stem.

Vase life: About 6–10 days. Remove leaves below the water line.

For Edible Seeds

Seeds are ready when:

Petals have dried and fallen.

The back of the head turns from green to yellow to brown.

Seeds are plump and fully striped, with hard shells.

Protect heads: Cover maturing heads with cheesecloth, netting, or a paper bag to deter birds and squirrels.

How to harvest:

Cut the head with 1–2 feet of stem attached.

Hang upside down in a dry, well-ventilated area for 2–3 weeks.

Rub seeds loose by hand or with a stiff brush.

Roasting: Soak seeds overnight in salted water, drain, then roast at 300°F for 30–40 minutes until golden.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Seeds eaten before sprouting:

Cause: Birds or small animals digging up seeds.

Action: Cover planted areas with netting or wire until seedlings are established.

Seedlings cut off at soil level:

Cause: Cutworms feeding at night.

Action: Place a simple collar around the stem base to block them.

Plants falling over:

Cause: Wind, heavy flower heads, or shallow roots.

Action: Stake plants early (around 3 feet tall) and grow in a sheltered spot.

Leaves yellowing or wilting:

Cause: Often overwatering or poor drainage.

Action: Allow soil to dry slightly between waterings and ensure good drainage.

Seeds eaten before harvest:

Cause: Wildlife feeding on mature heads.

Action: Cover heads once petals fall and harvest promptly when ready.

Small or missing flower heads:

Cause: Too much shade, crowding, or excess nitrogen.

Action: Ensure full sun, proper spacing, and moderate feeding.

Quick Tips

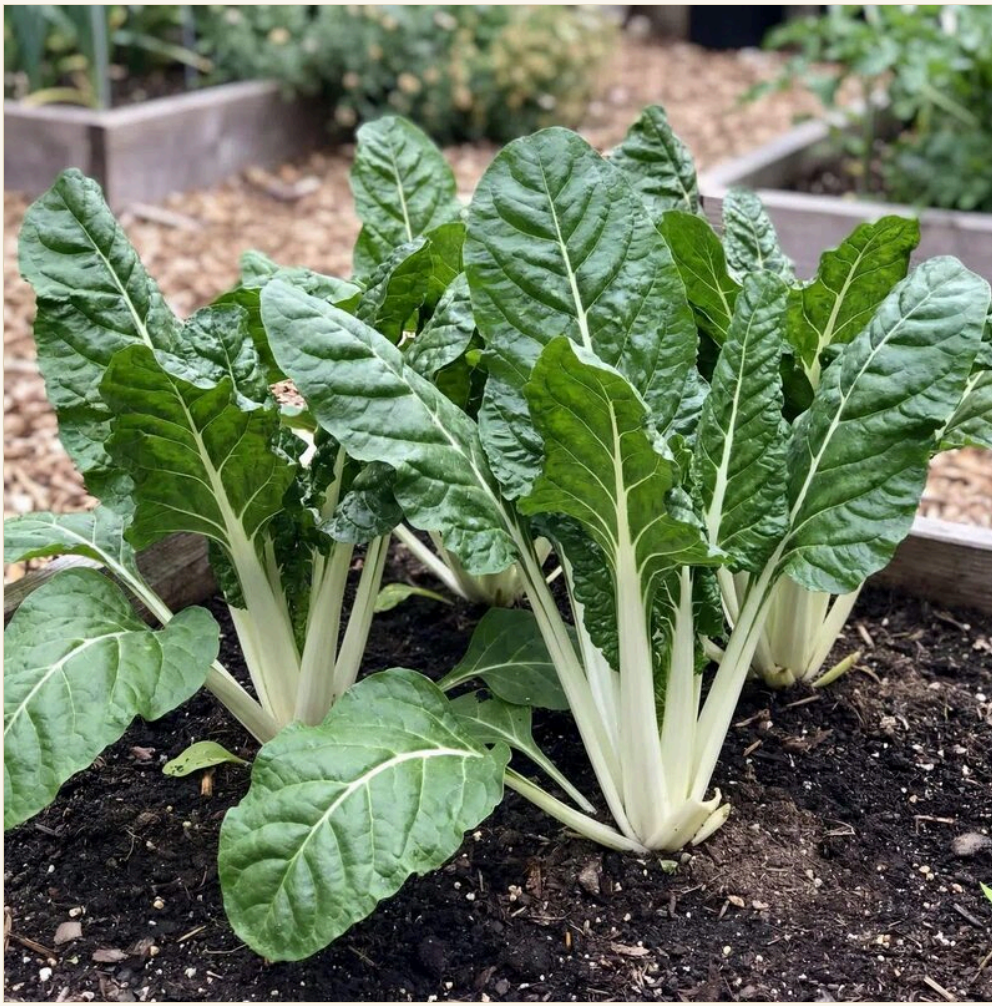
- Protect seeds early and again at maturity to stay ahead of wildlife.
- Stake plants before they start leaning.
- Wider spacing leads to larger flower heads.
- A great beginner crop with fast, visible results.

Mini Checklist

- Planted after last frost when soil reached 70°F
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep
- Seedlings protected from birds
- Plants thinned to 18–24 inches apart
- Full sun location
- Staked in windy areas
- Watered at the base
- Seed heads protected during ripening
- Harvested when backs turned brown
- Seed heads dried before removing seeds

[#toc](Back to TOC)Plant Profile

Swiss Chard



Why This Is Easy

Tough and forgiving: Once established, Swiss chard keeps producing new leaves for a long time.

Heat-tolerant for a leafy green: It usually handles warm spells better than spinach and many lettuces, making it less fussy in everyday gardens.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1/2 inch
- **Spacing / thinning:** Thin to 4–6 inches for baby-leaf harvests, or 8–12 inches for larger plants with thicker stems and better airflow.

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–14 days
- **When to thin:** About 2–3 weeks after sprouting, or when seedlings are around 2 inches tall with a few true leaves
- First harvest (baby leaves): About 25–35 days
- Larger leaves + stems: About 50–60 days
- **Ongoing harvest:** Once established, plants continue replacing leaves as long as you harvest correctly (outer leaves first, center intact).

When to Plant

Swiss chard is a cool-weather crop that adapts well as conditions change. Plant in spring around your last frost window, and plant again later for a fall crop. When summer warms up, chard often keeps producing—especially if moisture stays steady and plants receive some afternoon shade during hot spells.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is the simplest approach.

Loosen the soil so roots can grow easily and water can drain well.

Place seeds where you want your row or small patch.

Cover to the recommended depth, then gently press the soil for good seed contact.

Water gently so seeds are not washed out of place.

Optional: You can start indoors and transplant, but Swiss chard is usually happiest when started where it will grow.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering (no fixed schedule):

If soil feels dry → water

If soil feels damp → wait

If soil feels soggy → stop watering and let it dry slightly

Other simple care:

Aim for steady moisture so leaves stay tender, but avoid waterlogged soil.

Sun & Shade

In hot spells, afternoon shade can reduce stress and help maintain leaf quality.

Feeding (if applicable)

Compost mixed into the soil is usually enough.

If growth looks weak, a light top-dress of compost can help.

Keep weeds down so chard isn’t competing for water and nutrients.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Harvest outer leaves first and always leave the center growing point intact.

Pick regularly to encourage steady new growth.

Remove older leaves if they become thick, tough, or tired-looking so the plant focuses on fresh growth.

Harvest as baby leaves for milder flavor, or let leaves grow larger for fuller bunches.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Leaf miners (squiggly tunnels):

Remove and discard damaged leaves.

Check undersides of leaves.

A light cover or netting helps prevent egg-laying.

Slugs, snails, or chewing holes:

Inspect plants in the evening or early morning.

Hand-pick pests.

Rinse leaves before eating.

Use a light cover if damage continues.

Yellowing leaves:

First check moisture and drainage, then sunlight.

Fix “too wet” or “too dry” conditions before adding anything to the soil.

Crowding:

Thin plants so air can move freely through the leaves.

Crowding leads to weaker plants and more pest pressure.

Quick Tips

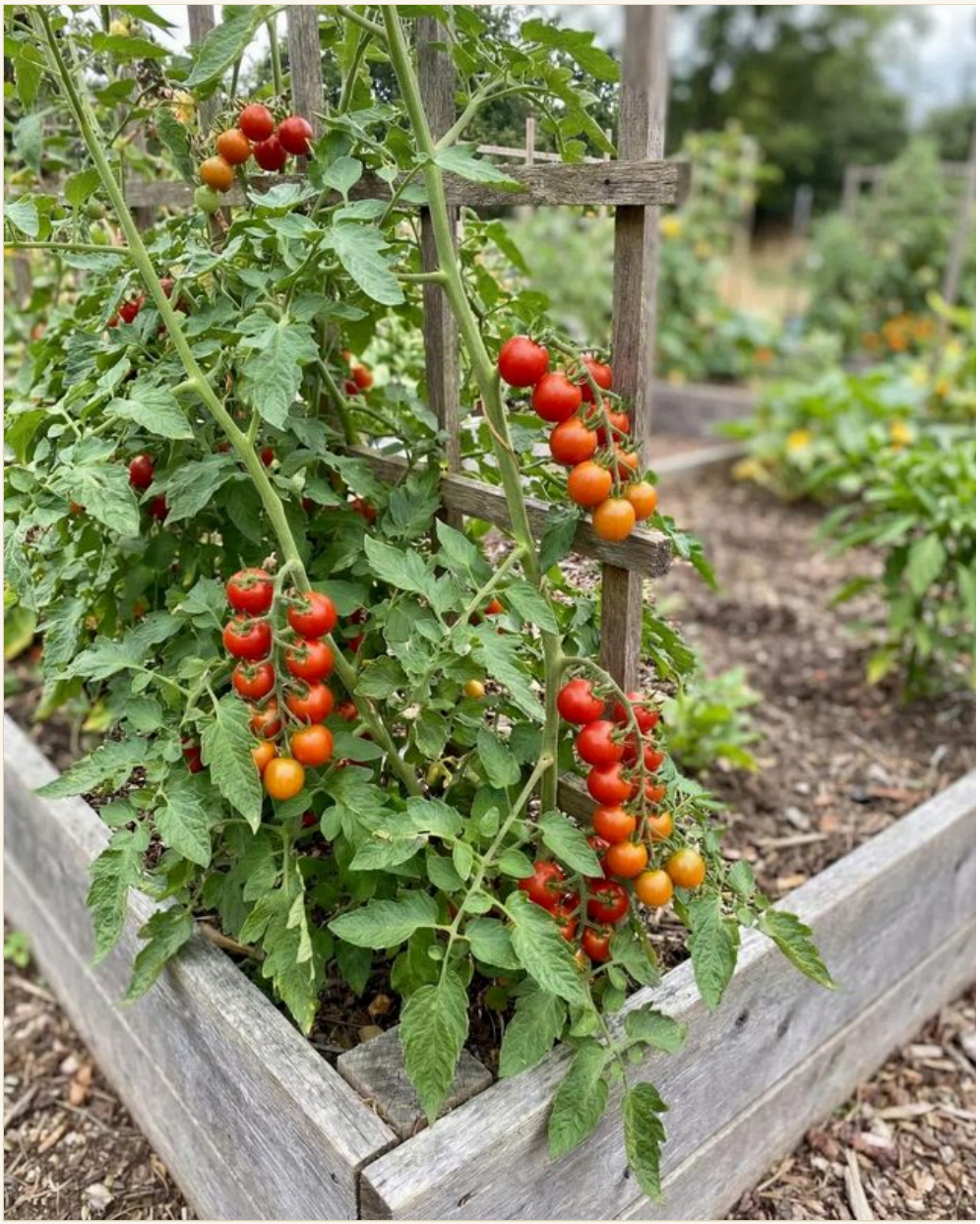
- Start harvesting as soon as leaves are usable—frequent picking keeps leaves tender.
- Always harvest outer leaves first and protect the center.
- If leaves toughen, switch to younger harvests and keep moisture steady.

Mini Checklist

- Planted Swiss chard 1/2 inch deep and pressed soil gently
- Kept soil lightly moist during germination
- Thinned seedlings to match harvest goals (baby leaf or full size)
- Used check-first watering (dry = water, damp = wait, soggy = stop)
- Harvested outer leaves while protecting the center
- Removed damaged or old leaves to encourage new growth
- Watched for leaf miners and chewing pests and addressed them early

[#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

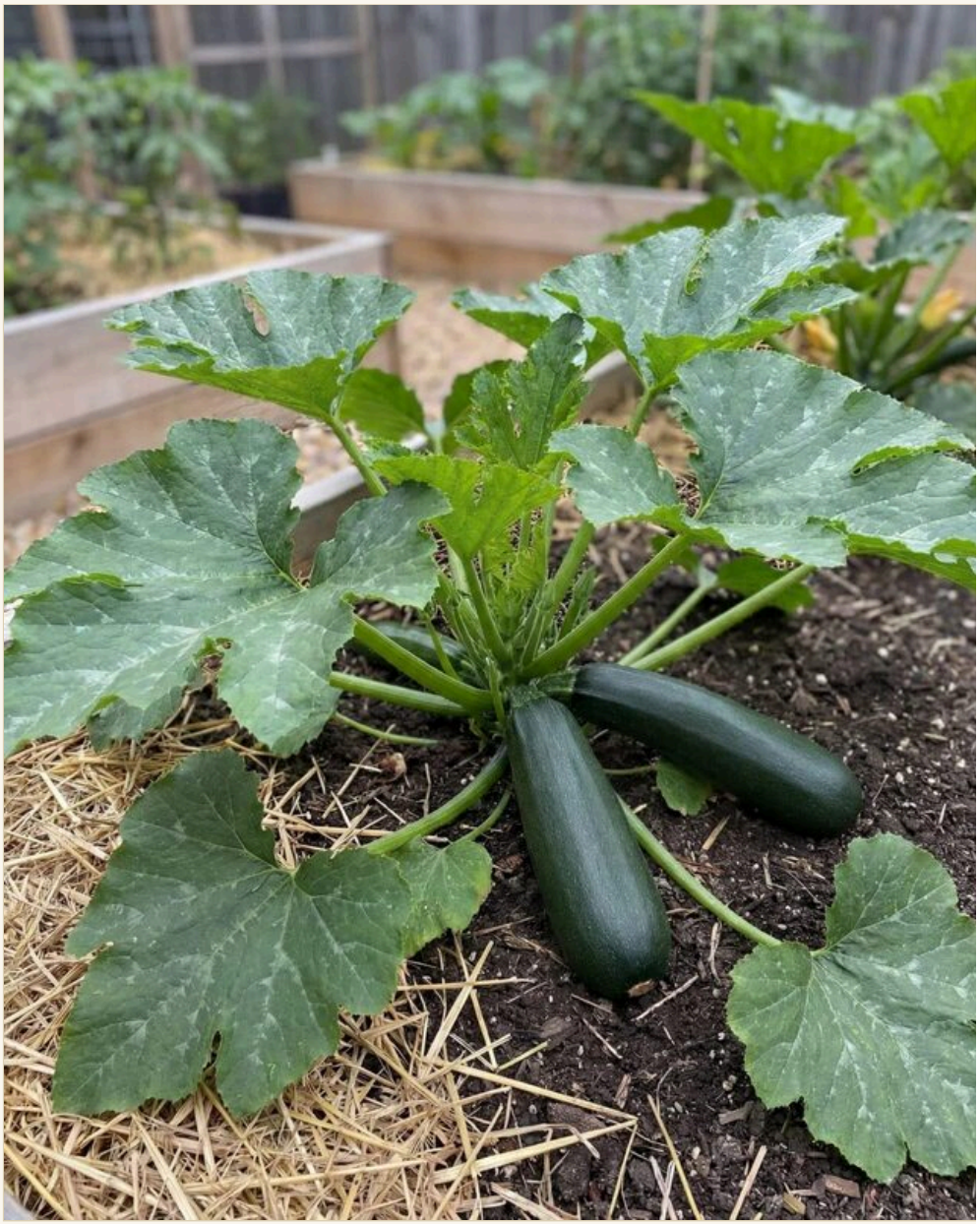
- **Space matters:** Proper spacing prevents most disease issues.
- **Two hands when harvesting:** Hold the plant with one hand and cut with the other.
- **Daily walk:** Once fruiting starts, squash can grow an inch a day—check plants every morning.

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

Zucchini – Black Beauty



Why This Is Easy

A true beginner favorite: Zucchini is famously productive. One or two plants often produce more than enough for most households.

Fast and vigorous: Once the weather is warm, plants grow quickly—from a small sprout to a large, leafy bush in just a few weeks.

Planting Specs (Depth + Spacing)

- **Depth:** 1 inch
- **Spacing:** 24–36 inches apart (zucchini needs plenty of room for airflow)

Timeline (What to Expect)

- **Sprout window:** 7–12 days
- **When to thin:** When seedlings have their first set of true (jagged) leaves
- **First harvest:** 45–55 days
- **Ongoing harvest:** Once fruiting begins, check plants every 24 hours—zucchini grows very fast

When to Plant

Zucchini is a warm-weather crop with no frost tolerance. Seeds can rot in cold, wet soil.

Spring: Plant only after soil is warm and all danger of frost has passed.

Summer: If plants slow down by mid-summer, a second planting in July can provide a fresh harvest in early fall.

Cold warning: Unexpected cold (below 40°F) can stunt growth or damage leaves.

How to Plant

Direct sowing is best. Zucchini grows so quickly that it often outgrows indoor containers.

Prepare: Choose a sunny location and mix in compost. Zucchini is a heavy feeder and performs best in rich soil.

Sow: Plant 2–3 seeds together in a small group (a “hill”), about 1 inch deep.

Cover: Lightly cover with soil and gently firm for good seed contact.

Water: Keep soil moist until the large green sprouts emerge.

Care Made Simple

Watering Logic Check-first watering:

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

If damp → wait

Tip: Zucchini needs plenty of water for fruit production, but wet leaves encourage disease. Always water the soil, not the foliage.

Sun & Shade

Light: Full sun (at least 6–8 hours)

Heat: Zucchini grows best between 70°F and 90°F

Feeding (if applicable)

If plants look pale or flower production slows, add compost around the base as a light top-dressing.

Harvest (Keep It Producing)

Best size: Harvest zucchini at 6–8 inches long for best flavor and texture.

Don’t let them oversize: Very large fruit becomes tough and signals the plant to slow production.

Use tools: Cut fruit with a knife or scissors. The stems are thick and prickly, and pulling can damage the plant.

Common Problems + Quick Fixes

Powdery mildew (white spots on leaves):

Action: Improve airflow and keep leaves dry when watering. Remove badly affected leaves if needed.

Squash bugs:

Action: Check undersides of leaves for orange or bronze egg clusters and remove them. Hand-pick adult bugs when seen.

Fruit rot:

Cause: Small fruits that yellow and rot early were not pollinated.

Fix: Be patient and allow time for pollinators, or plant nearby flowers to attract bees.

Quick Tips

- Zucchini flowers are edible and can be harvested for cooking.
- Check plants daily—fruit size can change quickly.
- Adequate spacing reduces disease and keeps plants healthier.

Mini Checklist

- Soil warm and frost-free
- Seeds planted 1 inch deep
- Thinned to one strong plant per spot
- Watering at the base only
- Harvesting regularly at 6–8 inches
- Weekly checks under leaves for insect eggs

[#toc](Back to TOC)