

## Garden Bites: Tender Vegetables

The weather is about to warm up (we promise) and it is time to think about filling out the rest of the garden with all those warm-weather, sun-loving vegetables. We know, because you are a dedicated gardener, that you already have the beets, lettuce, peas, and carrots planted and perhaps you have already done some harvesting. But who can think of a garden without imagining a tomato fresh from the vine or a just-picked ear of corn? The work is not done yet, so get busy.

### Shop for Plants

Our growing season is short enough in the northwest that some tender vegetables must be started from a transplant rather than a seed. If you didn't get around to starting your own seeds, shop early in local nurseries for the best selection. Choose plants that have good color and look healthy. Store the plants on a well-lit, warm windowsill until it is time to transplant them to the garden. Remember to water regularly and transplant to a larger pot if necessary. Before moving to the garden, "harden off" plants first by gradually exposing them to direct sun and wind over a week or two.

Although you may be anxious to move your plants to the garden, it does no good to rush many tender vegetables. In fact, fruit set can be seriously degraded, for example on peppers or eggplants, if they are planted while nighttime temperatures are too low. So wait until the soil's day and night temperatures are consistently in the right zone for each kind of vegetable. A soil thermometer is a very useful and inexpensive (\$5-10) tool to help you determine when the weather is right for your vegetables. Check the soil temperature in your garden early in the morning over several days. The soil will get warmer during the day, but an early morning check will capture the soil temperature during the night. Of course, you can go out in the middle of the night with your thermometer and a flashlight, but we don't have to be that scientific about this.

Here is a list of some of the tender vegetables that are best done as transplants.

- Basil – transplant when days are 65°F.
- Brussels Sprouts – transplant around mid-May.
- Cape Gooseberry (or Ground Cherry) – transplant with tomatoes.
- Cauliflower – transplant in early May.
- Celery – transplant when soil is 60-65°F and nights are above 55°F.
- Eggplants – transplant when days are 70°F and nights are above 55°F.
- Melons – transplant when soil is 70-85°F.
- Okra – transplant after all chance of frost, mid to late May.
- Peppers – transplant when soil is 60-65°F and nights are above 55°F.
- Tomatoes – transplant after all chance of frost, mid to late May.

- Tomatillos – transplant with tomatoes.

## Seeds

We also have many vegetables that can easily be started from seed as late as June or July and will still have plenty of time to produce a bounty. For most of these, it does not pay to buy transplants. Shop nurseries or catalogs for your favorite varieties and follow the directions on the seed package for proper planting times. Remember to plant beans and corn in intervals to prolong the crop.

- Lima Beans – plant seeds when soil is 65-85°F.
- Snap Beans (bush or pole) – plant seeds when soil is 65-85°F.
- Soy Beans (Edamame) – plant seeds when soil is 65-75°F.
- Corn – plant seeds when soil is a minimum of 65-70°F, late May.
- Cucumber – plant seeds when soil is 70-95°F, mid-June.
- Herbs – plant seeds when soil is 70°F.
- Summer Squash – plant seeds when soil is 65-75°F.
- Turnip, Rutabaga – plant seeds when soil is 55-80°F.
- Winter Squash, Pumpkin – plant seeds when soil is 60-75°F.

In order to get an early start on squash or cucumbers, seeds can be started indoors a few weeks early. However, cucurbits in general do not transplant easily, so the plants should not have more than two sets of leaves before moving them. Handle very gingerly, being careful not to disturb the roots. Peat pots can also be used to avoid damaging the roots.

Wow, look at all the possibilities for your garden! Sure hope you saved room...

## References

Fell, Derek. *Vegetables – How to Select, Grow and Enjoy*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1982.

Yepsen, Roger. *A Celebration of Heirloom Vegetables*. New York: Artisan, 1998.

Oregon State University Extension Service. [Growing Your Own](#).

[Territorial Seed Company](#). Spring 2002 Catalog. This catalog is full of information on seed culture, diseases, insects, and harvesting. This is also a good source for vegetable varieties which do well in the Pacific northwest. For a catalog, call 541-942-9547 or go online to their website.