

## Vegetables 101

Vegetables straight from the garden to your plate are hard to resist. Not only do they taste better, you know where they came from and what went into their production. Are you thinking about starting a vegetable garden to save money, to feel assured that your produce is pesticide free, or just because you want to? Here are some basics to get you growing.

Pick a site that receives at least 6 hours of sun per day, is protected from the wind, and keep it close to a convenient supply of water. Provide your bed with deep, easily worked, well drained soil containing at least 5% organic matter. Most vegetables do well with a pH of 6.2 to 6.8 which is slightly acid. If your soil is high in clay, consider building raised beds. Now comes the fun part.

Here in the Pacific Northwest, except for the winter of 2008, we are blessed with a climate that allows us to grow something edible almost 12 months out of the year. Sometimes, the hard part is selecting the vegetables and varieties that are appropriate for the season. Our teaser days of sun in March or April, the early garden shows and retailers entice us into planting those warm season tomatoes, peppers, beans or basil too early. Inevitably, the cool wet weather returns and our transplants suffer.

Each type of plant has its own optimum air temperature at which it performs the best. Warmer nighttime temperatures are most critical for fruit set on peppers, tomatoes, cucumber and melons. Soil temperature also plays a key role in determining the rate of germination for direct sown seeds and plant growth. The nitrogen cycle, which is important in making nutrients available to plants, is inactive below 40 degrees F and most active between 80–90 degrees F. Generally, we have a 50–50 chance of being frost free after April 20th up until October 15th with an average of around 177 frost free days. With this in mind, the following chart summarizes basic information regarding planting dates and approximate time to harvest for many popular vegetables. You will notice that many vegetables are suitable for both early spring (cool season) and late fall planting and harvesting. Keep in mind that this is generalized information and may not fit your particular site or our current weather patterns.

Vegetable	Family	Planting time in zone 8–9*	Plant as	Approx Days to Harvest
Beet	Chenopodiaceae/Goosefoot	Apr – June	Seed	46-65
Broccoli	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Mar, Aug	Plant	50-90
Brussels sprouts	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Aug	Plant	80-90
Cabbage	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Jan – Feb	Plant	60-120
Carrot	Umbelliferae/Parsley	May – June	Seed	65-75
Cauliflower	Brassicaceae/Mustard	July – Aug	Plant	60-100
Chinese cabbage	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Apr, July – Aug	Seed	65-80
Cucumber	Cucurbitaceae/Gourd	May – June	Seed	55-65
Eggplant	Solanaceae/Nightshade	May – June	Plant	65-80

Endive	Asteraceae/Sunflower	Apr – May	Seed	65-90
Garlic	Alliaceae/Onion	Oct	Cloves	180
Kale	Brassicaceae/Mustard	May, July	Seed	50-60
Kohlrabi	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Apr – May	Seed	55-65
Leek	Alliaceae/Onion	Apr	Seed	110
Lettuce	Asteraceae/Sunflower	Mar – Apr, Aug	Seed	40-95
Lima bean	Fabaceae/Pea	Apr – June	Seed	65-95
Muskmelon	Cucurbitaceae/Gourd	May – June	Seed	50-95
Okra	Malvaceae/Mallow	May	Seed	Seed
Onion - bunching	Alliaceae/Onion	Mar – Apr, Sept	Seed	60-75
Onion – bulbing	Alliaceae/Onion	Feb – Apr, Nov – Feb	Sets	100-120
Pepper	Solanaceae/Nightshade	May – June	Seed	60-80
Popcorn	Poaceae/Grass	May – June	Seed	45-60
Potato	Solanaceae/Nightshade	Dec – June	Seed Potatoes	90-105
Pea	Fabaceae/Pea	Feb – Apr, Sept	Seed	60-70
Pumpkin	Cucurbitaceae/Gourd	Apr – June	Seed	100-120
Radish	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Mar – May, Sept – Oct	Seed	20-50
Snap bean	Fabaceae/Pea	Apr – June	Seed	50-70
Soybean	Fabaceae/Pea	Apr – June	Seed	50-70
Spinach	Chenopodiaceae/Goosefoot	Apr – May	Seed	40-50
Squash	Cucurbitaceae/Gourd	Mar – June	Seed	50-60
Sweet corn	Poaceae/Grass	May – June	Seed	45-60
Sweet potato	Convolvulaceae/Bindweed	Apr	Seed Potatoes	80-90
Swiss chard	Chenopodiaceae/Goosefoot	Mar – Apr, Aug	Seed	100-135
Tomato	Solanaceae/Nightshade	Apr – July	Plant	55-90
Turnip	Brassicaceae/Mustard	Mar – May	Seed	35-60
Watermelon	Cucurbitaceae/Gourd	May – June	Seed	80-95

\*Per Sunset Western Garden Book

When selecting your plants, look for disease resistant varieties that are bred for our climate conditions. Catalogs like Territorial Seed Company, and Nichols Garden Nursery located in the Northwest are great resources for varieties particularly adapted to our area. With an existing bed, practice crop rotation. Crops in the same family may host the same diseases, so rotate families, not just species. For example, foliar blights are common diseases of tomatoes and potatoes, and can severely damage both crops. Snap beans, cabbages, and cucumbers (any vegetable not in the Solanaceae/Nightshade family) would be a better choice. Once your vegetables are off to a good start, keep them healthy with adequate moisture, feeding, and weeding.

There are myriads of variations on design and layout of the vegetable garden, based on space available, interest level, and maintenance - the possibilities are limited only by imagination. Intensive gardening techniques such as close planting to shade out weeds, raised beds, vertical gardening, interplanting, and succession planting are means to coax maximum harvest out of minimal spaces. These methods all merit separate discussion. Many vegetable varieties are suitable for deck planters. For a comprehensive discussion of container vegetable gardening, complete with directions for a self watering planter check out this [University of Maryland Cooperative website](#). Whether you are a beginner or a veteran the delights of home grown vegetables can be yours to enjoy.

## References

<http://www.territorialseed.com/>

<http://www.nicholsgardennursery.com/>

Sunset Books, ed. *Western Garden Book*, 5th ed., Menlo Park, Lane Publishing, 1989.

Pat Patterson. Vegetable Gardening. In *Sustainable Gardening, the Oregon-Washington Master Gardener Handbook*, OSU, reprinted December, 2004.