

SEED STARTING SCHEDULE - PRAIRIE NEST HOMESTEAD

Perfect Timing for Healthy Transplants

Download and customize this schedule for your growing zone and frost dates.

HOW TO USE THIS SCHEDULE

Find Your Growing Zone

Zones 3-4: Very Cold - Last frost typically mid to late May **Zones 5-6:** Cold to Moderate - Last frost typically early to mid May

Zones 7-8: Moderate to Warm - Last frost typically mid-March to mid-April **Zones 9-10:** Warm to Hot - Last frost typically mid-February to early March

Understanding Timing

- **Weeks before last frost:** Count backward from your average last frost date
- **Indoor start date:** When to plant seeds indoors
- **Transplant date:** When to move seedlings outdoors
- **Days to germination:** Expected time for seeds to sprout

Seed Starting Success Tips

- Use fresh, quality seeds from reputable sources
 - Provide consistent moisture and temperature
 - Ensure adequate light (12-16 hours daily)
 - Harden off seedlings before transplanting
 - Keep detailed records for future years
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SEED STARTING CALENDAR BY CROP

EXTRA EARLY STARTS (10-12 weeks before last frost)

Start Date: Early February (Zones 5-6) | Mid-January (Zones 7-8) | Late December (Zones 9-10)

Onions and Leeks

- **Start indoors:** 10-12 weeks before last frost

- **Transplant:** 4 weeks before last frost
- **Germination:** 7-14 days
- **Growing tips:** Keep cool (60-65°F), trim tops to 3-4 inches
- **Varieties:** Yellow Sweet Spanish, Red Burgundy, King Richard Leeks

Celery and Celeriac

- **Start indoors:** 10-12 weeks before last frost
 - **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks before last frost
 - **Germination:** 14-21 days (slow!)
 - **Growing tips:** Needs consistent moisture, cool temperatures
 - **Varieties:** Utah 52-70, Giant Red, Tall Utah
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EARLY STARTS (8-10 weeks before last frost)

Start Date: Mid-February (Zones 5-6) | Early February (Zones 7-8) | Mid-January (Zones 9-10)

Artichokes

- **Start indoors:** 8-10 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks after last frost
- **Germination:** 7-14 days
- **Growing tips:** Need vernalization (cold period) to flower
- **Varieties:** Green Globe, Imperial Star

Cabbage Family (First Planting)

- **Start indoors:** 8-10 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 2-4 weeks before last frost
- **Germination:** 4-7 days
- **Growing tips:** Keep cool, provide good air circulation
- **Varieties:** Early Jersey Wakefield, Copenhagen Market

Lettuce (First Planting)

- **Start indoors:** 8-10 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 4-6 weeks before last frost

- **Germination:** 4-7 days
 - **Growing tips:** Keep cool, succession plant every 2 weeks
 - **Varieties:** Black Seeded Simpson, Buttercrunch, Red Sails
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MID-SEASON STARTS (6-8 weeks before last frost)

Start Date: Early March (Zones 5-6) | Mid-February (Zones 7-8) | Early February (Zones 9-10)

Tomatoes

- **Start indoors:** 6-8 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
- **Germination:** 5-10 days
- **Growing tips:** Keep warm (70-75°F), provide strong light
- **Varieties:**
 - **Determinate:** Roma, San Marzano, Stupice
 - **Indeterminate:** Cherokee Purple, Brandywine, Black Krim

Peppers (Hot and Sweet)

- **Start indoors:** 8-10 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks after last frost
- **Germination:** 7-14 days
- **Growing tips:** Need consistent warmth (75-80°F for germination)
- **Varieties:**
 - **Sweet:** California Wonder, Jimmy Nardello's, Sweet Banana
 - **Hot:** Jalapeño, Serrano, Thai Dragon

Eggplant

- **Start indoors:** 8-10 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks after last frost
- **Germination:** 7-14 days
- **Growing tips:** Need warm conditions, slow growing
- **Varieties:** Black Beauty, Japanese Long, Rosa Bianca

Herbs (Tender)

- **Start indoors:** 6-8 weeks before last frost
 - **Transplant:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
 - **Germination:** 7-21 days (varies by type)
 - **Growing tips:** Most prefer warm conditions
 - **Varieties:**
 - **Basil:** Genovese, Thai, Purple Ruffles
 - **Oregano:** Greek, Hot & Spicy
 - **Thyme:** Common, Lemon, Creeping
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LATE STARTS (4-6 weeks before last frost)

Start Date: Mid-March (Zones 5-6) | Early March (Zones 7-8) | Mid-February (Zones 9-10)

Brassicas (Second Planting)

- **Start indoors:** 4-6 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** At or just after last frost
- **Germination:** 4-7 days
- **Growing tips:** For summer harvest, choose heat-tolerant varieties
- **Varieties:**
 - **Broccoli:** Calabrese, De Cicco, Waltham 29
 - **Cauliflower:** Snow Crown, Cheddar, Purple Cape
 - **Kale:** Red Russian, Winterbor, Lacinato

Swiss Chard

- **Start indoors:** 4-6 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks before last frost
- **Germination:** 7-10 days
- **Growing tips:** Heat tolerant, succession plant for continuous harvest
- **Varieties:** Bright Lights, Fordhook Giant, Ruby Red

Asian Greens

- **Start indoors:** 4-6 weeks before last frost
 - **Transplant:** 2-3 weeks before last frost
 - **Germination:** 4-7 days
 - **Growing tips:** Quick growing, prefer cool weather
 - **Varieties:** Bok Choy, Mizuna, Tatsoi, Komatsuna
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WARM SEASON STARTS (3-4 weeks before last frost)

Start Date: Late March (Zones 5-6) | Mid-March (Zones 7-8) | Early March (Zones 9-10)

Cucurbits (Squash Family)

- **Start indoors:** 2-4 weeks before last frost
- **Transplant:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
- **Germination:** 4-7 days
- **Growing tips:** Don't transplant too early, hate root disturbance
- **Varieties:**
 - **Summer Squash:** Pattypan, Zucchini, Yellow Crookneck
 - **Winter Squash:** Butternut, Acorn, Hubbard
 - **Cucumbers:** Boston Pickling, Marketmore, Lemon
 - **Melons:** Cantaloupe, Watermelon (zones 6+)

Annual Flowers

- **Start indoors:** 4-6 weeks before last frost
 - **Transplant:** After last frost
 - **Germination:** 5-14 days (varies by type)
 - **Growing tips:** Pinch growing tips to encourage bushiness
 - **Varieties:**
 - **Cut Flowers:** Zinnias, Marigolds, Cosmos, Sunflowers
 - **Edible Flowers:** Nasturtiums, Calendula, Borage
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DIRECT SEEDING SCHEDULE

COOL SEASON CROPS (Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost)

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COOL SEASON CROPS (Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost)

Root Vegetables

- **Carrots:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost, succession plant every 3 weeks
- **Radishes:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost, succession plant every 2 weeks
- **Beets:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost, succession plant every 3 weeks
- **Turnips:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost
- **Parsnips:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost (long season crop)

Greens and Brassicas

- **Spinach:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost, succession plant every 2 weeks
- **Arugula:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost, succession plant every 2 weeks
- **Mâche (Corn Salad):** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost
- **Mustard Greens:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost

Legumes

- **Peas (Shell and Snap):** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost
- **Fava Beans:** Plant 4-6 weeks before last frost (zones 7+)

WARM SEASON CROPS (Plant after soil warms to 60°F+)

Beans

- **Bush Beans:** 1-2 weeks after last frost, succession plant every 3 weeks
- **Pole Beans:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
- **Lima Beans:** 2-3 weeks after last frost (need warm soil)

Corn

- **Sweet Corn:** 1-2 weeks after last frost, succession plant every 2 weeks
- **Popcorn:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
- **Dent Corn:** 1-2 weeks after last frost

Warm Season Vegetables

- **Okra:** 2-3 weeks after last frost

- **Sunflowers:** 1-2 weeks after last frost
 - **Amaranth:** 2-3 weeks after last frost
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SUCCESSION PLANTING SCHEDULE

CONTINUOUS HARVEST CROPS

Plant every 2-3 weeks for constant supply

Lettuce Succession

- **First planting:** 8-10 weeks before last frost (indoors)
- **Second planting:** 4-6 weeks before last frost (indoors/outdoors)
- **Third planting:** 2 weeks before last frost (outdoors)
- **Continue:** Every 2 weeks until summer heat
- **Resume:** Late summer for fall harvest

Beans Succession

- **First planting:** 1 week after last frost
- **Second planting:** 3 weeks after first
- **Third planting:** 6 weeks after first
- **Continue:** Until 10-12 weeks before first fall frost

Radish Succession

- **First planting:** 6 weeks before last frost
 - **Continue:** Every 2 weeks during cool weather
 - **Resume:** Late summer for fall harvest
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FALL PLANTING SCHEDULE

CALCULATING FALL PLANTING DATES

Count backward from first expected fall frost date

Cool Season Crops for Fall Harvest

- **Lettuce:** 8-10 weeks before first frost

- **Spinach:** 8-10 weeks before first frost
- **Kale:** 10-12 weeks before first frost
- **Broccoli:** 12-14 weeks before first frost
- **Cabbage:** 12-16 weeks before first frost
- **Carrots:** 10-12 weeks before first frost
- **Beets:** 8-10 weeks before first frost

Winter Storage Crops

- **Storage Onions:** Start indoors 10-12 weeks before last spring frost
 - **Garlic:** Plant 4-6 weeks before ground freezes
 - **Shallots:** Plant 4-6 weeks before ground freezes
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SEED STARTING EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Essential Equipment

- ☐ Seed starting trays with drainage holes
- ☐ Seed starting mix (sterile, soilless)
- ☐ Plant labels and waterproof marker
- ☐ Spray bottle for gentle watering
- ☐ Heating mat for germination (optional but helpful)
- ☐ Grow lights or bright south-facing window
- ☐ Fan for air circulation
- ☐ Thermometer to monitor soil temperature

Nice-to-Have Equipment

- ☐ Self-watering seed trays
 - ☐ Timer for grow lights
 - ☐ Humidity dome for germination
 - ☐ Seedling potting mix for transplanting
 - ☐ Individual pots (2-4 inch) for transplanting
 - ☐ pH testing kit for water
 - ☐ Liquid fertilizer for feeding seedlings
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TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON PROBLEMS

Poor Germination

Possible Causes:

- Old seeds (test germination rate)
- Wrong temperature (too hot or cold)
- Seeds planted too deep
- Inconsistent moisture
- Poor quality seed starting mix

Solutions:

- Test seed viability before planting
- Use heating mat for warm-season crops
- Follow seed packet depth recommendations
- Keep soil consistently moist but not soggy
- Use fresh, sterile seed starting mix

Leggy Seedlings

Possible Causes:

- Insufficient light
- Too much heat
- Overcrowding

Solutions:

- Provide 12-16 hours of bright light daily
- Keep cool-season crops at 60-65°F
- Transplant seedlings to larger containers
- Use fan for air circulation

Damping Off (Seedlings fall over and die)

Possible Causes:

- Overwatering

- Poor air circulation
- Contaminated soil
- Too much humidity

Solutions:

- Water from bottom when possible
- Provide good air circulation
- Use sterile seed starting mix
- Remove humidity dome after germination

Slow Growth

Possible Causes:

- Cool temperatures
- Insufficient light
- Need fertilizer
- Root bound

Solutions:

- Check temperature requirements
- Increase light duration/intensity
- Begin fertilizing 2 weeks after germination
- Transplant to larger containers

HARDENING OFF SCHEDULE

Week Before Transplanting

Gradually accustom seedlings to outdoor conditions

Day 1-2: Place outside in shade for 2-3 hours **Day 3-4:** Increase to 4-5 hours, partial sun **Day 5-6:** Full day outside, bring in at night **Day 7:** Leave outside overnight if no frost threat **Day 8:** Transplant to garden

Hardening Off Tips

- Start process 7-10 days before transplanting

- Watch weather - bring inside if frost threatens
 - Reduce watering slightly during process
 - Don't fertilize during hardening off
 - Choose calm, cloudy day for first outdoor exposure
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RECORD KEEPING TEMPLATES

Seed Starting Log

Crop: _____ Variety: _____ Seed Source: _____ Year: _____ Start Date: _____
 Expected Germination: _____ Actual Germination Date: _____ Germination
 Rate: _____% Transplant Date: _____ Success Rate: _____% Notes: _____

Annual Seed Starting Review

What worked well this year:

- _____
- _____
- _____

What to improve next year:

- _____
- _____
- _____

New varieties to try:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Equipment needed:

- _____

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CLIMATE ZONE ADAPTATIONS

Zones 3-4 (Very Cold Climates)

- Start seeds 2-3 weeks later than schedule
- Focus on cold-hardy varieties
- Use season extension heavily
- Consider starting more seeds indoors

Zones 5-6 (Cold to Moderate Climates)

- Use schedule as written
- Good balance of indoor/outdoor starting
- Plan for late spring frost protection

Zones 7-8 (Moderate to Warm Climates)

- Start seeds 2-3 weeks earlier than schedule
- Can direct seed more crops
- Focus on heat-tolerant varieties for summer

Zones 9-10 (Warm to Hot Climates)

- Start seeds 4-6 weeks earlier than schedule
 - Extensive use of fall and winter growing
 - Choose heat and humidity tolerant varieties
 - Focus on cool-season crops in winter
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MONTHLY SEED STARTING CHECKLIST

JANUARY

- ☐ Order seeds for the year
- ☐ Set up seed starting area
- ☐ Test germination of stored seeds
- ☐ Start onions and leeks (zones 7+)

FEBRUARY

- ☐ Start cool-season crops indoors
- ☐ Start tomatoes, peppers, eggplant
- ☐ Check and maintain equipment
- ☐ Begin succession planning

MARCH

- ☐ Continue warm-season starts
- ☐ Begin hardening off cool-season crops
- ☐ Start cucurbits and flowers
- ☐ Transplant first cool-season crops

APRIL

- ☐ Transplant warm-season starts
- ☐ Direct seed cool-season crops
- ☐ Begin summer succession planting
- ☐ Start fall crop planning

MAY

- ☐ Transplant heat-loving crops
- ☐ Continue succession planting
- ☐ Start fall brassica seeds
- ☐ Evaluate spring success

JUNE-JULY

- ☐ Start fall crops for transplanting
- ☐ Continue succession planting
- ☐ Plan winter growing setup
- ☐ Order fall/winter seeds

AUGUST

- ☐ Major fall planting push
- ☐ Start winter greenhouse crops
- ☐ Succession plant fall greens
- ☐ Prepare for season extension

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

- ☐ Plant garlic and overwintering onions
- ☐ Start seeds for winter growing
- ☐ Clean and store equipment
- ☐ Evaluate year's successes

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

- ☐ Plan next year's seed orders
- ☐ Maintain winter growing setups
- ☐ Study seed catalogs
- ☐ Review and improve records

Customize this schedule for your specific climate zone and growing conditions. Keep detailed records to improve your timing each year!