

Early Vegetable Sowing Guide



For most of us, the garden year begins in Spring. A sudden spell of warm weather may have your fingers itching to dig and plant, but don't be too hasty – even cool-season crops will not grow in ice-encrusted soil. But if you wait for the right planting conditions and choose the right crops, you can start harvesting weeks before your neighbors!

Planting Conditions

There are two ways you can determine the right planting time for your area: by soil temperature or by the last frost date.

- Monitor the soil warmth with a soil thermometer, and plant when the temperature is consistently at least 55 F but less than 70 F.
- Alternatively, find out the last average date of the last spring frost in your area, then count back 2 to 8 weeks, depending on the kind of crop you have. Dupage County's last average frost date is around May 15th.

Cool-Weather Crop Guide

The hardiest cool weather crops can be planted as soon as the soil is thawed and dry enough to work in Spring, generally at a soil temperature of 35-40 F:

- Fava beans
- Lettuce
- Spinach
- Turnips

Moderate cool-weather crops do better when planted 2 - 8 weeks before last average frost date (Mid-March to Early May):

- Beets
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Carrots
- Corn
- Onions
- Peas
- Potatoes

Helpful Tips

- Most early crops, including root vegetables and leafy greens grow best from direct seeding.
- Make sure you harden off any transplants grown indoors by exposing them to the elements slowly. Start by putting them outside for just a few hours and then increase their amount of time outside for a week until they are ready to plant.
- Plants such as broccoli, cabbage, kale, and Brussels sprouts can often be grown indoors and transplanted as seedlings during cool-weather sowing.
- Always review the seed packet to determine optimal planting dates.

The GardenWorks Project, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization empowers, educates, and promotes organic suburban agriculture to improve the wellbeing of our community, the environment, and families facing food insecurity. We support all gardeners in their efforts to grow and prepare food for themselves and their neighbors in need. Learn how you can get involved at: gardenworksproject.org