



GETTING YOUR SPRING GARDEN STARTED

SPRING CHECKLIST

- Cut back old plant growth and pull weeds
- Suppress future weeds with burlap, straw (w/o seeds), or a top dressing of compost
- Plan your season (make a reasonable timeline for yourself, choose crops, and figure how much space each will take up)
- Sharpen and clean your tools
- Purchase seeds (local & organic when possible)
- Purchase/make a good complete organic fertilizer and foliar feed
- Test for soil moisture
- Turn the soil and break up clods (best to do when the soil has had time to dry out)
- Amend the soil with compost

MAKE A PLAN

Vegetables have different starting dates with some doing well in cool temperatures, while others prefer warmer soil. These soil temps, along with the amount of space they need, and “days to maturity” will be written on the back of the seed packets. Factors, such as a late or wet spring may require you to modify your planting schedule. Planting too early may prevent germination or rot seeds.

Refer to a Portland-specific Vegetable Planting Guide for the best time to direct seed, or transplant. Portland’s Last Frost Date: Depends on the Spring! (March 15 to Mid-May???)

CHECK YOUR SOIL

Portland’s winter rains will compact garden soils and deplete it of important nutrients for your new plants. Before cultivating the soil in the spring you’ll want to test for moisture. Working the soil when it’s too wet can cause clods and hinder seed germination and root development. Adding organic matter is necessary to help the soil’s fertility as well as the texture.

SOIL MOISTURE TEST

- 1) Dig a hole 6”-8” deep and form a ball of soil the size of a golf ball
- 2) Toss the ball about 1’ in the air and catch it with a flat/open hand. If the soil crumbles when it lands, then your soil is ready for planting. If it stays in a ball then your soils still needs to dry out

ADDING ORGANIC MATERIAL

Adding Compost:

- 1) Spread a layer of compost on top of the bed (1-3 inches on established beds with a decent soil structure, and up to 6 inches for neglected beds with poor soil).
- 2) Turn it into the top 6 inches of soil with a digging fork.

Sowing a Fall Cover Crop:

With proper planning, you may substitute compost and protect your soil during the winter by sowing a fall cover crop such as (Crimson Clover, Vetch, Rye, etc).

- 1) In late September, broadcast seeds.
- 2) In spring, after about 1/3 of the crop has begun to flower, chop down the crop
- 3) Allow it to decompose for 2-4 weeks and then till it into the soil.

SOWING SEEDS

Seeds can either be direct seeded in the garden plot, or started in cells and transplanted 4-6 weeks later. It is sometimes easier for beginning gardeners to purchase “starts” for transplanting, although it is less cost effective.

DIRECT SEEDING

- Plant seeds to a depth of 3 or 4 times their thickness.
- Keep seeds constantly moist until true leaves appear.
- Vegetables to direct seed in late February/early March (*when soil is consistently at or above 40°F*): lettuce, spinach, arugula, salad mix, onions, peas, radish and fava.
- Vegetables that prefer to be direct seeded, rather than transplanted: Roots (beets, carrot, radish, etc), Greens (lettuce, arugula, spinach, salad mix), Legumes (peas, beans, etc), Garlic, and Cucurbits (squash, cucumbers)
- Remember to “thin” emerged seedlings to their proper spacing requirement (as listed on seed package). Thinning will allow nutrients to go directly to the selected seedling.

WEBSITES

- Oregon Tilth online Toolshed- Urban Garden Resources and Planning Tools: <http://tilth.org/education-research/organic-education-center/the-toolshed>
- ATTRA Sustainable Ag. Publications: <https://attra.ncat.org/publication.html>
- OSU Extension Master Gardener Program Online Resources & Ask an Expert: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/community/gardening>
- OSU Cooperative Extension-Organic Production: http://www.extension.org/organic_production
- eOrganic: <http://eorganic.info/>

BOOKS

- Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades, by Steve Solomon
- The New Organic Grower & Four Season Harvest, by Eliot Coleman
- The Maritime Northwest Garden Guide, by Seattle Tilth
- Gaia’s Garden: A Guide to Home Scale Permaculture, by Toby Hemenway
- Lasagna Gardening, by Patricia Lanza