

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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GROWING VEGETABLE TRANSPLANTS IS ALL ABOUT TIMING

Figuring out when to plant vegetable seeds indoors isn't challenging, but can be a little mind bending. It involves counting backwards.

To determine when to plant seeds of a particular vegetable or flower, first find out when it should be planted in the garden. Usually this is given in a range of weeks before or after the average last frost date which is April 17th around here. Then find out how many weeks it should be grown indoors prior to setting it out. (If you are curious, the average fall frost free date in Salina is October 20, and we average 187 frost free days per year.)

Tomatoes should be planted in the garden 2-3 weeks after the average last frost (or 32 degree freeze). They should be grown for 5-6 weeks before planting out. So adding 2-3 weeks to April 17 gives us the 2nd week of May (May 7-12). Count back 5-6 weeks and we have the last week of March. Tomatoes should be planted indoors during the last week of March.

Some sources will vary in their recommendations on when to plant indoors, but don't worry, it is not an exact science as there are many variables that will affect the growth rate of the plant. If you plant the seeds of tomatoes any time in March, you are on schedule. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplants etc... are warm season plants with a long period of harvest. There is a lot of leeway available in their scheduling.

In contrast, a crop such as broccoli is a cool season plant with a short harvest period. If it is not planted early, it will not be productive. It may be safer to buy broccoli transplants, as well as cabbage, cauliflower and brussel sprouts, if you are starting a little bit late. These plants should be seeded indoors in early February and planted out in early April.

TIPS for Growing Transplants in the Home:

Don't plant all the seed in a packet just because it is there. Often the plants from one seed packet will be too many to handle. The task of throwing out the excess is too traumatic for many gardeners. The urge is to preserve plants at any cost and the result is a mess of too many plants. Plant the number you need plus an additional percentage in anticipation of some failures.

Watch your seedlings carefully. Temperature and light are important factors. Provide proper light by keeping the fluorescent bulbs within 2 to 4 inches of the plants. It is also a good idea to brush the plants with your hand several times a day to encourage strong stocky stems.

Avoid damping off, a fungus disease that kills many young seedling plants. Don't over-water. Use a fine top-dressing of milled sphagnum moss because it has anti-fungal properties. Don't let separate pots or flats touch one another as this helps damping off travel from pot to pot or flat to flat.

Get the plants out of the house before they get leggy. Give them a hardening off period to gradually introduce them to the outdoors before the final move to the garden.

The following list gives some target dates for planting indoors:

Jan 1-7	onions
Jan 14-Feb 7	cabbage, kohlrabi
Jan 21-Feb 14	broccoli, brussel sprouts, collards, parsley
Feb 14-28	cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, lettuce, peas, spinach
Mar 14-21	peppers, eggplant
Mar 14-31	tomatoes
Mar 21-31	okra, peanuts
Mar 28-Apr 7	beans, gourds
Apr 7-14	cucumber
Apr 21	muskmelon, pumpkin, squash, watermelon