

## Starting Spring Crops from Seed

These are the crops you can plant first:

Spinach

Peas

Lettuce

Radish

Mizuna and Tatsoi (mild Asian Greens--often used in salad mix)

Chervil (a fresh herb for salads and cooking)

You can plant seeds or plants outdoors if the soil temperature is above 45. Generally that's when ground itself is no longer frozen, and is well-drained enough to crumble when handled (light frosts are OK). Trees are usually breaking dormancy at that time, with their buds swelling and getting ready to leaf out. You can check soil temperature by sticking a thermometer 3 or 4 inches into the soil first thing in the morning. Or start seedlings on a sunny windowsill inside to get an earlier start. You can plant them out when soil temperatures are over 45 and frost is not severe. Plant out your seedlings from flats outdoors when they have 4 or 5 leaves (See our section on tomatoes, below).

These crops can go in about 2 weeks later, when soil temps are around 50:

Beets, Broccoli, Cabbage, Turnips, Pak Choi, Chard

Even if you don't have a place indoors to start seedlings, it can be helpful to start the seeds in flats or pots at first. That way, you don't have to wait until you get the whole vegetable bed prepared--all you need are flats or pots and some potting mix (or soil and compost.) You can prepare the bed while the little seedlings are growing. You can control the spacing of your plants when you transplant them, instead of sowing lots of seed too thickly, and having to thin them later--which is time-consuming, fiddly work, besides wasting seed. You can put the flats where they can get the most sun. And you can keep them safe from cats, birds, slugs, wind, and other hazards of the open garden just by slipping chicken wire, clear plastic or other cover over them. Sow seeds in loose, well-drained soil that has had compost worked in. Plant each seed twice as deep as the seed is wide.

A good habit is to sow only part of your seed at first, saving the rest to plant a week or two later. That way, if the seeds come to harm in some way, you still have some. And when harvest time comes, you won't have all your produce at once, but can pick over a long period. This is referred to in books and catalogs as "succession-sowing"

### What should a beginner grow?

When you are starting, it's nice to grow just a little bit of something that's fast, easy, and at its best when fresh-picked. So a good way to start is a small garden bed or container for salads. A square 3X3 feet or a half barrel can give you a lot of tasty salads if you keep picking the outside leaves. Give each little plant it's own space and enough water, and success with lettuce will teach and inspire you. You might want to add some spinach (if it is still cool) or some chard for cooking greens. They are easy to grow, you can cut them over and over, and the chard comes in a rainbow of colors.

To eliminate all worry about what varieties to plant when, you can get the Spring Salad Collection, with 4 different colors and types of lettuce, an herb, and an edible flower all selected for spring planting. (There are Summer and Fall salad collections too, with different varieties that grow especially well then.)

To keep it really simple, you can buy a few tomato plants from a local nursery once the weather is warm, rather than trying to grow them from seed this year. (We don't recommend buying lettuce plants--they are easy from seed and the ones at the nursery seldom do well.)