

Gardening Step by Step



Vegetable Gardening Guide and Calendar for USDA Zones 5-6 Gardens

Use this vegetable gardening guide to plan your plot, maximise harvests, and enjoy home-grown veg from early spring through to winter.

The Vegetable Guide

This guide is designed to be read alongside our handy monthly vegetable gardening calendar, which sets out the key sowing, planting and harvesting information on a month-by-month basis. **The calendar starts on page 13 below.**

This guide provides specific timing for indoor starting, direct sowing, transplanting and harvesting of common garden vegetables. By following these recommendations and utilizing season-extension techniques like row covers, cold frames, and succession planting, you can maximise productivity through the season. The detailed recommendations are selected specifically for Zones 5-6 conditions. Remember, local conditions and micro-climates can affect timings, so please take those into account.

Aubergine (Eggplant)

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr (8 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Mid-May to early Jun (2-3 weeks after last frost)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct
- **Tips:** Needs warm soil to thrive. Use black plastic mulch to warm soil. Choose varieties that mature in 70-80 days like 'Black Beauty', 'Millionaire', or 'Fairy Tale'.

Broad Beans (Fava)

- **Direct sow:** Mar-Apr (as soon as soil can be worked); optional Oct (for zones with milder winters)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Jul
- **Tips:** Prefers cool growing conditions. Can handle light frosts. Fall planting can work in zone 6 with good mulch protection.

French/Runner Beans

- **Sow indoors:** Apr (3-4 weeks before last frost)
- **Direct sow:** May-Jul (after frost)
- **Transplant:** Mid-May (after all danger of frost)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct

- **Tips:** Succession plant every 2-3 weeks until mid-July for continuous harvest. Pole beans produce longer into the season.

Beetroot (Beets)

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Jul (as soon as soil can be worked); Aug (for fall crop)
- **Transplant:** May (if started indoors, though direct sowing is preferred)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Oct
- **Tips:** Succession plant every 3-4 weeks. Fall crop often produces the sweetest beets. 'Detroit Dark Red' and 'Bull's Blood' perform well.

Broccoli (Calabrese)

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr (4-6 weeks before last frost); Jun (for fall crop)
- **Transplant:** Apr-May (spring crop); Jul (fall crop)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Jul (spring planting); Sep-Oct (fall planting)
- **Tips:** Prefers cool weather. Heat-resistant varieties like 'Belstar' work well for summer.

Broccoli – Purple Sprouting

- **Sow indoors:** May-Jun
- **Transplant:** Jun-Jul
- **Harvest:** Mar-Apr the following year
- **Tips:** Overwintering is possible in zone 6 and protected areas of zone 5 with mulch. Provide wind protection.

Brussels Sprouts

- **Sow indoors:** Apr-May (4-6 weeks before last frost)

- **Transplant:** May-Jun
- **Harvest:** Sep-Nov (flavor improves after frost)
- **Tips:** Long-season crop that performs well in cool climates. 'Churchill' and 'Diablo' are reliable varieties. Side-dress with nitrogen midseason.

Cabbage – Spring

- **Sow indoors:** Feb-Mar (6-8 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Apr (after danger of hard frost)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Jul
- **Tips:** Use fast-maturing varieties like 'Stonehead' or 'Golden Acre'.

Cabbage – Summer

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr
- **Transplant:** Apr-May
- **Harvest:** Jul-Aug
- **Tips:** Plant heat-resistant varieties that won't split in summer conditions. 'Primo' and 'Gonzales' are good choices.

Cabbage – Red/Savoy (Autumn)

- **Sow indoors:** May-Jun
- **Transplant:** Jun-Jul
- **Harvest:** Sep-Nov
- **Tips:** Fall cabbage can withstand frosts, which improve flavor. 'Ruby Perfection' (red) and 'Savoy Ace' (savoy) are reliable choices.

Carrots

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Jul (as soon as soil can be worked); Aug (for fall crop)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Nov
- **Tips:** Succession plant every 3 weeks. Keep soil consistently moist for best germination. Fall carrots can be left in ground with heavy mulch for winter harvest in zone 6.

Cauliflower – Summer

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr (4-6 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Apr-May
- **Harvest:** Jun-Aug
- **Tips:** Self-blanching varieties like ‘Snow Crown’ simplify growing. Water consistently to prevent button heads.

Cauliflower – Fall

- **Sow indoors:** May-Jun
- **Transplant:** Jun-Jul
- **Harvest:** Sep-Nov
- **Tips:** Fall cauliflower often produces better heads in cooling temperatures. Try ‘Amazing’ and ‘Skywalker’.

Celeriac

- **Sow indoors:** Feb-Mar (10-12 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** May-Jun
- **Harvest:** Sep-Nov
- **Tips:** Requires a long growing season. Provide consistent moisture throughout growing season. ‘Monarch’ and ‘Brilliant’ are reliable varieties.

Celery

- **Sow indoors:** Feb-Mar (10-12 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** May
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct
- **Tips:** Requires consistent moisture and rich soil. Self-blanching varieties like 'Tango' are easier for home gardeners. Mulch helps maintain soil moisture.

Chard (Swiss Chard)

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Jul (as soon as soil can be worked)
- **Transplant:** May (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Nov
- **Tips:** Highly cold-tolerant and heat-resistant. Can be harvested until hard freeze. 'Bright Lights' and 'Fordhook Giant' are popular varieties.

Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini)

- **Sow indoors:** Apr (3-4 weeks before last frost)
- **Direct sow:** May-Jun (after frost)
- **Transplant:** May-Jun
- **Harvest:** Jun-Oct
- **Tips:** Black plastic mulch helps warm soil. Harvest frequently for continued production. 'Black Beauty' for traditional and 'Yellowfin' for yellow zucchini.

Cucumbers

- **Sow indoors:** Apr (3-4 weeks before last frost)
- **Direct sow:** May-Jun (after frost)

- **Transplant:** May-Jun (after soil has warmed)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Sep
- **Tips:** Bush types work well for small gardens; vining types for trellising. 'Marketmore 76' is disease-resistant; 'Lemon' is an interesting heirloom variety.

Garlic

- **Direct sow:** Oct-Nov (before ground freezes) or early Apr (spring planting)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Aug
- **Tips:** Fall planting produces larger bulbs. Mulch for winter protection. Hardneck varieties like 'Music' and 'German Red' do well in zones 5-6.

Kohl Rabi

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Jul (as soon as soil can be worked); Aug (for fall crop)
- **Transplant:** May (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** May-Oct
- **Tips:** Fast-growing crop that performs well in cool weather. 'Early White Vienna' and 'Kolibri' (purple) are reliable varieties. Harvest when bulbs are 2-3 inches in diameter.

Melons

- **Sow indoors:** Apr (4 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Late May-Jun (when soil is thoroughly warm)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Sep
- **Tips:** Choose shorter-season varieties (75-85 days) like 'Minnesota Midget' cantaloupe or 'Sugar Baby' watermelon. Black plastic mulch and row covers help warm soil.

Kale

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Jul (as soon as soil can be worked); Aug (for fall/winter crop)
- **Transplant:** May (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Dec
- **Tips:** Extremely cold-hardy and improves in flavor after frost. 'Lacinato' (Dinosaur) and 'Red Russian' are popular varieties. Fall crop can often be harvested into early winter.

Lettuce

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Sep (succession plant every 2 weeks)
- **Transplant:** Apr-Sep (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** May-Nov
- **Tips:** Heat-resistant varieties like 'Muir' and 'Nevada' for summer; cold-tolerant types like 'Winter Density' for fall.

Leeks

- **Sow indoors:** Feb-Mar (8-10 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Apr-May
- **Harvest:** Jul-Dec
- **Tips:** Plant deeply and mound soil as they grow for more white stem. 'King Richard' matures early; 'Bleu de Solaise' is very cold-hardy for late harvest.

Onions

- **Sow indoors:** Feb-Mar (8-10 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Apr-May
- **Harvest:** Jul-Sep

- **Tips:** Use “long-day” onion varieties in zones 5-6. ‘Patterson’, ‘Copra’, and ‘Walla Walla’ perform well. Sets can be planted as soon as soil can be worked.

Spring Onions (Scallions)

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Aug (succession plant every few weeks)
- **Harvest:** May-Oct
- **Tips:** ‘Parade’ and ‘Evergreen Hardy White’ are reliable varieties.

Parsnips

- **Direct sow:** Apr-May (as soon as soil can be worked)
- **Harvest:** Sep-Mar (sweetest after frost)
- **Tips:** Long-season crop that improves with frost. ‘Hollow Crown’ and ‘Harris Model’ are traditional favorites. Can be left in ground with heavy mulch for winter harvest.

Peas

- **Direct sow:** Mar-May (as soon as soil can be worked); Aug (for fall crop in zone 6)
- **Transplant:** Apr-May (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** May-Jul; Oct-Nov (fall crop)
- **Tips:** Early spring crop does best. ‘Sugar Snap’, ‘Oregon Sugar Pod II’, and ‘Little Marvel’ are reliable. Fall crop possible in zone 6 if planted by early August.

Peppers (Sweet & Chilli)

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr (8 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Mid-May to early Jun (after soil is warm)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct

- **Tips:** Bell peppers like ‘California Wonder’ and ‘King of the North’ perform well. For hot peppers, ‘Hungarian Wax’ and ‘Jalapeño’ are reliable in cooler climates.

Potatoes

- **Plant:** Apr-May (when soil temp reaches about 50°F)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Sep (depending on variety)
- **Tips:** Early varieties like ‘Red Norland’ and ‘Yukon Gold’ mature in 70-90 days. Maincrop types like ‘Kennebec’ take longer but store better.

Pumpkins/Squash

- **Sow indoors:** Apr-May (3-4 weeks before last frost)
- **Direct sow:** Late May-Jun (after frost)
- **Transplant:** Late May-Jun (after soil has warmed)
- **Harvest:** Aug-Oct
- **Tips:** For pumpkins, ‘Connecticut Field’ and ‘Jack Be Little’ are reliable. Winter squash like ‘Buttercup’ and ‘Delicata’ store well. Summer squash types produce earlier.

Radish

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Sep (succession plant)
- **Harvest:** May-Oct (3-4 weeks after sowing)
- **Tips:** Quick-growing crop perfect for succession planting. ‘Cherry Belle’, ‘French Breakfast’, and ‘White Icicle’ mature in just 3-4 weeks. Winter radishes like ‘Daikon’ are sown in late summer.

Rocket (Arugula)

- **Direct sow:** Apr-Sep (succession plant every 2-3 weeks)
- **Harvest:** May-Nov

- **Tips:** Cool-season crop that grows quickly. Heat makes it bolt and become bitter; grow in partial shade during summer.

Spinach

- **Direct sow:** Mar-May; Aug-Sep (for fall crop)
- **Harvest:** May-Jun; Sep-Nov
- **Tips:** Spring crop often bolts in June heat; fall crop more reliable. 'Bloomsdale' is a reliable heirloom; 'Tyee' and 'Space' resist bolting better in warm weather.

Sweet Corn

- **Direct sow:** May-Jun (when soil warms to 60°F or 2 weeks after last frost)
- **Transplant:** Late May-Jun (if started indoors)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct
- **Tips:** Choose varieties suited to your season length. 'Bodacious' (yellow) and 'Silver Queen' (white) are reliable choices. Succession plant every 2 weeks for extended harvest.

Turnips

- **Direct sow:** Apr-May; Jul-Aug (for fall crop)
- **Harvest:** Jun-Nov
- **Tips:** Fast-growing crop. 'Purple Top White Globe' is a standard variety. Fall-grown turnips have sweeter flavor. Harvest baby turnips for tender roots.

Swedes (Rutabaga)

- **Direct sow:** May-Jun
- **Harvest:** Sep-Nov

- **Tips:** Longer-growing than turnips but very cold-hardy. 'American Purple Top' is the classic variety. Flavor improves after frost. Can be stored for winter use.

Tomatoes

- **Sow indoors:** Mar-Apr (6-8 weeks before last frost)
- **Transplant:** Mid-May to early Jun (after all danger of frost)
- **Harvest:** Jul-Oct
- **Tips:** For earliest tomatoes harvest, try 'Early Girl' or 'Stupice'. For main crop, 'Brandywine', 'Cherokee Purple', and 'Roma' are popular. Indeterminate types produce until frost; determinate types ripen more at once.

The Vegetable Gardening Calendar

January

Indoor Activities:

- Plan garden layout and order seeds
- Inventory and repair tools and equipment
- Clean and sharpen garden tools
- Review previous year's garden journal for planning improvements
- Set up indoor seed starting area and check grow lights

February

Sow Indoors:

- Cabbage (Spring)
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Leeks
- Onions
- Peppers (late month)

Indoor Activities:

- Begin seed germination tests
- Clean and sanitize seed trays and pots
- Start monitoring soil temperature as snow melts

March

Sow Indoors:

- Aubergine (Eggplant)
- Broccoli (Calabrese)
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cabbage (Spring) – finish sowing
- Cabbage (Summer)
- Cauliflower (Summer)
- Lettuce (for transplants)
- Onions (finish sowing)
- Peppers (Sweet & Chilli)
- Tomatoes

Sow Outdoors (as soil allows, zones 5-6):

- Broad Beans (late month, when soil workable)
- Peas (under row cover, when soil workable)
- Spinach (under row cover, when soil workable)

Outdoor Activities:

- Set up cold frames
- Test soil temperature and pH
- Apply compost to beds as soil thaws
- Prune fruit trees and bushes before buds break
- Remove winter mulch gradually as weather warms

April

Sow Indoors:

- Broccoli (Calabrese) – final sowings
- Cauliflower (Fall)
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini)
- Cucumbers
- Melons
- Pumpkins/Squash (late month)

Sow Outdoors:

- Beetroot (mid-late month)
- Broad Beans
- Carrots (mid-month onward)
- Chard
- Kale
- Kohl Rabi
- Lettuce
- Onion sets
- Parsnips
- Peas (succession plantings)
- Potatoes (early varieties)
- Radish
- Rocket
- Spinach

- Spring Onions
- Turnips

Transplant:

- Broccoli (early varieties)
- Cabbage (Spring)
- Lettuce (early varieties)
- Onions

Harvest:

- Asparagus (zone 6, late month)
- Rhubarb (early harvest)
- Overwintered spinach
- Spring onions (overwintered)

May

Sow Indoors:

- Broccoli (Purple Sprouting)
- Cabbage (Red/Savoy) – for fall harvest
- Cauliflower (Fall)

Sow Outdoors:

- Beetroot
- Broad Beans (final sowings)
- Broccoli (for fall harvest)
- Carrots (succession sowing)
- Chard

- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini) – after frost
- Cucumbers – after frost
- French/Runner Beans (after soil warms)
- Kale
- Kohl Rabi
- Lettuce (succession sowings)
- Peas (succession sowings)
- Potatoes (main crop)
- Pumpkins/Squash (after frost)
- Radish (succession sowings)
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Spring Onions
- Swedes (Rutabaga)
- Sweet Corn (when soil warms to 60°F)
- Turnips

Transplant (after last frost):

- Broccoli (Calabrese)
- Cabbage (Summer)
- Cauliflower (Summer)
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Leeks
- Lettuce

- Onions
- Peppers (Sweet & Chilli) – late month when soil is warm
- Tomatoes – late month

Harvest:

- Asparagus
- Lettuce (early plantings)
- Peas (early varieties in zone 6)
- Radish
- Rhubarb
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Spring Onions

June

Sow Outdoors:

- Beetroot (succession sowings)
- Broccoli (for fall harvest, final sowings)
- Carrots (succession sowings)
- Chard
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini) – final sowings
- Cucumbers – final direct sowings
- French/Runner Beans (succession sowings)
- Kale (for fall/winter)
- Kohl Rabi

- Lettuce (succession sowings, choose heat-tolerant varieties)
- Peas (final sowings, choose heat-tolerant varieties)
- Radish (succession sowings)
- Rocket
- Spring Onions
- Sweet Corn (final sowings)

Transplant:

- Aubergine (Eggplant)
- Broccoli (Purple Sprouting)
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cabbage (Red/Savoy for fall)
- Cauliflower (Fall)
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini)
- Cucumbers
- Leeks
- Melons
- Peppers (Sweet & Chilli)
- Pumpkins/Squash
- Sweet Corn
- Tomatoes

Harvest:

- Asparagus (final harvests)
- Beetroot (early sowings)

- Broad Beans (early varieties)
- Broccoli (early varieties)
- Cabbage (Spring)
- Carrots (early varieties)
- Cauliflower (early varieties)
- Garlic scapes
- Lettuce
- Peas (early varieties)
- Potatoes (first earlies, late month)
- Radish
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Spring Onions
- Turnips (early sowings)

July

Sow Outdoors:

- Beetroot (final sowings for fall crop)
- Carrots (final sowings for fall crop)
- Chard (final sowings)
- French/Runner Beans (final sowings, early month)
- Kale (final sowings for fall/winter crop)
- Kohl Rabi (final sowings)
- Lettuce (heat-resistant varieties)

- Radish (succession sowings)
- Rocket (in partial shade)
- Spring Onions (final sowings)
- Turnips (for fall crop)

Transplant:

- Broccoli (for fall harvest, final chance)
- Cabbage (fall varieties, final chance)
- Cauliflower (fall varieties, final chance)

Harvest:

- Aubergine (Eggplant) – starting
- Beetroot
- Broad Beans
- Broccoli (Calabrese)
- Cabbage (Summer)
- Carrots
- Cauliflower (Summer)
- Celery (early varieties)
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini)
- Cucumbers
- French/Runner Beans
- Garlic (when tops begin to yellow)
- Kohl Rabi
- Lettuce
- Onions (early varieties)

- Peas
- Potatoes (early varieties)
- Radish
- Rocket
- Spring Onions
- Summer Squash
- Sweet Corn (early varieties in zone 6)
- Tomatoes (beginning to ripen)

August

Sow Outdoors:

- Kale (final sowings for zone 6)
- Lettuce (cold-hardy varieties for fall)
- Radish (fall crop)
- Rocket (fall crop)
- Spinach (for fall and potential overwinter)
- Spring Onions (for fall use)
- Turnips (final sowings for fall crop)

Outdoor Activities:

- Begin fall garden planning
- Order garlic for fall planting
- Begin collecting seeds from open-pollinated varieties

Harvest:

- Aubergine (Eggplant)
- Beetroot
- Broccoli (Calabrese)
- Cabbage (Summer)
- Carrots
- Cauliflower (Summer)
- Celeriac (early varieties)
- Celery
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini)
- Cucumbers
- French/Runner Beans
- Kohl Rabi
- Leeks (baby leeks)
- Lettuce
- Melons
- Onions (main crop, when tops fall over)
- Peppers
- Potatoes (second earlies and some maincrop)
- Pumpkins/Squash (summer varieties)
- Radish
- Rocket
- Sweet Corn
- Tomatoes
- Turnips

September

Sow Outdoors:

- Garlic (late month, zones 5-6)
- Lettuce (quick-growing varieties, under protection)
- Radish (quick varieties, under protection)
- Rocket (under protection)
- Spinach (under protection, for overwintering in zone 6)

Outdoor Activities:

- Begin preparing beds for next season
- Plant cover crops in harvested areas
- Apply row covers for frost protection on tender crops
- Order spring-flowering bulbs

Harvest:

- Aubergine (Eggplant)
- Beetroot (main harvest, store for winter)
- Broccoli (fall crop)
- Brussels Sprouts (after frost)
- Cabbage (Summer and fall varieties)
- Carrots (main crop, store for winter)
- Cauliflower (Fall)
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Courgettes/Marrows (Zucchini) – until frost

- Cucumbers – until frost
- French/Runner Beans – until frost
- Kale
- Kohl Rabi
- Leeks
- Lettuce
- Onions (cure for storage)
- Peppers
- Potatoes (maincrop, store for winter)
- Pumpkins/Winter Squash (before hard frost)
- Radish
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Spring Onions
- Swedes (Rutabaga)
- Sweet Corn (final harvests)
- Tomatoes (main harvest before frost)
- Turnips

October

Sow Outdoors:

- Garlic (zones 5-6)
- Broad Beans (zone 6 only, hardy varieties for overwintering)

Outdoor Activities:

- Plant garlic and shallots
- Apply compost to beds
- Mulch perennial vegetables
- Clean up garden debris to prevent disease
- Plant cover crops in empty beds

Harvest:

- Beetroot (final harvest, store for winter)
- Broccoli (fall crop, final harvests)
- Brussels Sprouts (improved by frost)
- Cabbage (fall varieties)
- Carrots (final harvest, store or leave some in ground in zone 6)
- Cauliflower (Fall, final harvests)
- Celeriac (main harvest)
- Celery (final harvests)
- Kale (continues after frost)
- Leeks
- Lettuce (cold frames or under protection)
- Parsnips (after frost for best flavor)
- Pumpkins/Winter Squash (cure for storage)
- Rocket (protected plants)
- Spinach (fall crop)
- Swedes (Rutabaga)
- Tomatoes (green tomatoes before frost)
- Turnips (store for winter)

November

Outdoor Activities:

- Final garden cleanup
- Protect perennial vegetables with mulch
- Finish planting garlic (early month)
- Test soil and amend based on results
- Apply winter mulch after ground begins to freeze
- Protect young fruit trees from rodents with guards

Harvest:

- Brussels Sprouts
- Cabbage (fall varieties, final harvests)
- Carrots (under mulch, zone 6)
- Kale (until heavy freeze)
- Leeks (until ground freezes)
- Parsnips (sweeter after frost, can be left in ground with mulch in zone 6)
- Swedes (Rutabaga, final harvest)

December

Indoor Activities:

- Review garden journal
- Plan next year's garden layout and crop rotation
- Inventory seeds and place orders for next season

- Check stored vegetables and remove any showing signs of rot
- Research new varieties and techniques

Harvest:

- Brussels Sprouts (until covered by snow)
- Kale (protected plants)
- Leeks (protected plants in zone 6)
- Root vegetables (from storage)
- Winter squash (from storage)