

Facts about Direct Vegetable Seed Planting

Skip starting seed indoors; plant directly outdoors with easily grown vegetables

When the soil warms to 50 to 60 degrees F., you can start seeds directly outdoors. Use a soil thermometer, a helpful way to ensure proper soil temperature and subsequent germination success.

Start with a weed free bed. Amend with 2–3" of compost worked into the loamy soil.

Follow spacing and depth directions on seed packets.

Fertilize with natural granular fertilizer.

If you have poor drainage, build raised beds.

Vegetables need 6–8 hours of sun per day to grow well.

Crop rotation is a must to deter disease, insect problems, and soil-nutrient depletion. Wait three years to replant the same crop.

Use a corner of a hoe or other tool to make shallow furrows to place seeds and gently cover them with soil. Mark your rows with tags to keep track of what you have planted. If you want straight rows tie a string from the tag/stake on one end to the stake on the other end.

After planting seeds, water with a gentle spray for even coverage. Keep soil moist, but not too wet, until the seeds germinate. Then water plants throughout the growing season on a regular schedule. For ease of watering, use a soaker hose or drip watering system. Do not use overhead sprinklers; water on leaves encourages fungal diseases.

After the seedlings are about 2 inches high, check the spacing of each plant. If seedlings are not at the recommended spacing, thin out too closely growing plants as needed by cutting them at ground level, and leave the well-spaced ones. Do not yank stems out of the ground which may disturb the remaining seedlings.

As plants grow and the weather warms up, add mulch a few inches away from the stems along the rows to conserve moisture and stop weeds from taking hold. Two or three inches of straw is a good mulching material.

Easy vegetables to direct seed in your garden:

Beets

Delicious, nutritious beets are simple to grow yourself. Directly sow beet seeds 1/2" deep and 1" apart into cool soil that has been well loosened and is free of rocks or clumps of compacted soil. Space rows of seeds 12–18" apart. After the seedlings have germinated,

thin them to 1” apart and make sure to wash and eat the delicious thinnings! As the seedlings grow, thin them to 4–6” apart and again, enjoy what you have pulled. Make sure to water deeply once a week. Check the seed packet for the approximate number of days after sowing that the beets will be ready for harvesting. Some tried-and-true varieties are ‘Detroit Dark Red’, ‘Early Wonder’ and ‘Burpee’s Golden’.

Bush Beans

Bush beans are simple to grow. After the soil has warmed in the spring, usually after Memorial Day, direct sow beans in well-drained soil in a sunny location 1” deep and 2” apart. Thin to 6” apart after germination. Don’t work around or harvest beans when the plants are wet to help prevent the spread of fungus in the plants. Harvest beans before you can feel the bean in the pod for best flavor. Try planting short rows every week or two to prolong the harvest throughout the summer and into the fall. A couple of outstanding varieties to try are ‘Derby’, ‘Bush Lake 274’, or the purple podded ‘Purple Queen’.

Cabbage

It is fun to watch cabbage form those beautiful heads and easy too. Simply plant cabbage starts 12–18” apart in a sunny spot in soil that has been amended with compost. Try to keep the soil evenly moist. When heads are firm to the touch, they are ready to harvest by cutting the head off of its stalk. Some great varieties to try are ‘Early Jersey Wakefield’, ‘Late Flat Dutch’ and purple ‘Mammoth Red Rock’.

Carrots

Nothing tastes quite like a freshly pulled carrot! Directly sow carrot seeds 3/8” deep into cool soil that has been loosened deeply and that is free of rocks or clumps of compacted soil. Space rows of seeds 15” apart. After the seedlings have germinated, thin them to 3” apart and mulch. Carrots quickly develop a long tap root that becomes the carrot. If that root can’t grow easily through the soil, the carrot will be misshapen. Water thoroughly once week. Check the seed packet for the approximate number of days after sowing that the carrots will be ready for harvesting. If your soil is shallow, try growing a shorter variety like ‘Parmex’ or ‘Little Finger’. Excellent full size varieties include ‘Scarlet Nantes’ and ‘Royal Chantenay’.

Cucumber

Cucumbers are easy to grow and a children’s favorite because once they get started they seem to grow overnight! Plant cucumbers in a sunny location where the soil doesn’t puddle, and give them lots of space. A happy cucumber will grow about 6 feet across. If you have a smaller garden, cucumber are easy to grow on a trellis. Water thoroughly once a week and mulch the garden in late June. Cucumbers lose their sweetness if they get too large, so it is best to harvest most varieties at around 8” long. Some sure winners are ‘Marketmore’, ‘Straight Eight’ and any “Burpless” hybrid.

Eggplant

Eggplant is a beautiful vegetable to grow with many lovely forms to choose from. Eggplants strongly prefer to be grown in very warm soil, so don’t plant until the middle

of June at the earliest. Plant in full sun about 18” apart. Water thoroughly once a week. Stake your plants as they grow so that they can support the weight of the eggplants. ‘Classic’ and ‘Black Beauty’ are two excellent tradition cultivars, and ‘Ghostbuster’ is a terrific white variety.

Herbs

Fresh herbs are so delicious and easy to grow. Choose a selection of your favorite herbs. Plant them in well-drained soil in a very sunny location. Some herbs like chives, English thyme, and oregano are quite hardy and come back year after year. Other herbs like basil, dill and rosemary are not and should be replaced annually. Harvest your herbs as required by snipping off what you need with sharp scissors.

Lettuce

There are so many beautiful lettuces to choose from and growing them couldn’t be easier. For a mesclun mix, simply scatter seed in a sunny spot over soil that has been amended with compost. Cover with 1/8” of soil. For romaine and other head lettuces, it is easier to begin with lettuce starts. Plant the starts about 6” apart and remember that you will have to thin (and eat!) as the lettuces get larger. Remember to water well if you are having a dry spell. To harvest leaf lettuce, simply remove the outer leaves of the plant and leave the rest to grow for another day. To harvest head lettuce, remove outer leaves, dig up the entire plant and cut off the head. For leaf lettuce, the mesclun mixes from many major seed companies are terrific, or try ‘Slobolt’ that won’t bolt in the summer heat. For head lettuces, try the spotted ‘Forellenschluss’, red ‘Four Seasons’, or crispy-smooth ‘Buttercrunch’.

Pepper

There are so many wonderful peppers out there and luckily, they are all easy to grow. Once the soil has warmed up, usually after Memorial Day, plant peppers in a sunny spot in rich soil about 18” apart. Varieties with large peppers or those that grow more than 24” tall should be staked. Water thoroughly once a week. Some great peppers to try are the sweet ‘Giant Marconi’, classic ‘Bell Boy’, and spicy ‘Cayenne’ or ‘Jalapeno’.

Pole Beans

Just a short row of pole beans can keep your family eating fresh beans throughout the summer. Pole beans require strong support and can grow on trellis, ladder, teepee, or even tall sunflowers! After you have your support in place in a sunny location and soil is warm (usually after Memorial Day), direct sow seeds 2” deep and 2” apart at the base. Thin them to 6” apart after germination. Guide the seedlings onto the support, taking care not to work bean plants when they are wet. This will help prevent fungal infection in the plants. Harvest beans before you can feel the bean in the pod for best flavor. Try ‘Kentucky Wonder’ for a fail-safe harvest, ‘Scarlet Runner Bean’ for non-stop flowers, and delicious beans too, or purple ‘Dow Purple Podded’.

Summer Squash

Summer squash is another super easy vegetable that seems to grow feet overnight once the dog days of summer arrive. Plant summer squash in a very sunny location and give

them room to roam. Squash can be trained on a trellis if space is an issue. Water thoroughly once a week and mulch the garden in late June. If you prefer yellow summer squash, try the classics 'Early Prolific Straightneck' or 'Early Yellow Summer Crookneck'. If it's green zucchini that you enjoy most, try 'Black Beauty' or 'Aristocrat'.

Swiss Chard

Perhaps the most forgiving of vegetables, Swiss chard is also incredibly nutritious. Swiss chard couldn't be easier to grow. Plant out starts about 8" apart. They will be happy with cool or warm soil, and in sun or even part shade. Water once a week. If the plants are growing faster than you can eat, remove outer leaves and the inner ones will soon take their place. Swiss chard is tolerant of light frosts, in fact, cooler temperatures bring out a nice sweetness in the leaves. Try 'Bright Lights' with its rainbow of colorful stems to brighten the garden and your plate.

Tomato

Tomatoes are a wonderful beginner's vegetable. Plant them deep into warm soil (after Memorial Day)—all the way to the bottom leaves—they can make roots all along their stem. Plant tomatoes at least 2 feet apart in full sun and water them very deeply once a week (the soil should be moist at least 6 inches down!). They will appreciate it if you can amend your soil with compost before you plant. Toward the end of June, mulch around them to help retain moisture and keep the soil warm. Most tomatoes are indeterminate, which means that they will keep growing, getting taller and lankier, so they require some support. Wire tomato cages are an easy fix. Some true performers include 'Big Boy', 'Celebrity', and the delicious heirloom 'Brandywine'. If cherry tomatoes are your pleasure, try delicious 'Sweet 100' or orange 'Sungold'.