



Gardeners Helping Gardeners Succeed

PLANTING/HARVESTING COOL SEASON VEGETABLES

BOK CHOY

When to plant: Sow seed directly into the ground in mid to late spring. Don't sow too early or the plants will bolt.

Harvesting: Bok Choy grows quickly – within a month of sowing you should be able to harvest young leaves. Allow the seedling to mature, and harvest when the ribs have thickened and formed a head.

BROCCOLI There are two slightly different types of broccolis. One is calabrese, which grows a large, green cauliflower-like head and is what we usually call broccoli. The other type is sprouting broccoli, which grows many small florets instead of a single head.

When to plant: Calabrese seeds are best sown from early to mid-spring. You can also sow in fall for a crop the following spring if you have a cold frame or greenhouse. Likewise, sow sprouting broccoli in mid to late summer and leave the plants in the ground until harvesting in late fall and winter or even early the following spring. Sow either type in early spring for harvesting in early summer. This is a cool-season annual that will tolerate frost but not hard freezes. If the temperature goes too high broccoli will bolt into flower stalks and go to seed before it can be harvested.

Harvesting: Harvest broccoli heads before they open with yellow flowers. Cut the stem below the head a few inches while the buds are tight but fully expanded. The side buds will produce numerous smaller shoots which are great for salads and stir-fry.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

When to plant: For sprouts that will be ready to harvest in early fall, sow seed in early spring or plant seedlings in mid to late spring. Brussels sprouts are always best when they mature in cold weather. Mature plants withstand hard freezes.

Harvesting: Brussels sprouts are usually ready to harvest about five months after sowing. For fall and winter crops wait until after the first frost, they will taste better. Starting with sprouts at the bottom of the stems, cut them with a sharp knife or snap them off by pulling downward. Another choice is to uproot the whole plant and leave the sprouts on the stem until you are ready to use them. They will keep for a few days standing in a bucket containing a little water or will last for several weeks if hung in a cool, frost-free place. The youngest leaves at the top of the stems can be harvested as 'sprout tops' and cooked like spring greens.

CABBAGE

When to plant: For a continuous harvest, sow cabbages of different types successively throughout the year. Start under cover at the beginning of spring for an early harvest of summer cabbages, and sow in late spring and summer for fall and winter harvesting if you have a cold frame or greenhouse.

Harvesting: Spring or early summer cabbages can be harvested as ‘spring greens’ once the young leaves appear, but before they form hearts. Otherwise leave them until they have ‘hearted up’ and are solid all the way through. Cut off the heads with a sharp knife and use them immediately. Fall and winter cabbages can be harvested later, then stored in a cool, dry area with good air circulation for a few months. Winter cabbages are frost-hardy and slow to bolt, so don’t feel pressured to lift your entire crop if frost is forecast. After harvesting, dispose of cabbage roots to prevent the spread of disease.

CAULIFLOWER

When to plant: Transplant seedlings in the early spring to harvest in the early summer. For summer and fall harvest sow in spring and transplant in early summer. Sow seeds for winter and spring in later spring and transplant in late summer. Use a cold frame or greenhouse to protect them from frost if you plan to overwinter them.

Harvesting: Harvest all cauliflower while the curds are still firm and tight. Unless you are going to eat them immediately, don’t cut off all the leaves around the heads (leaving a few leaves will help protect them). Summer cauliflower can be stored for a few weeks if you hang them upside down in a cool place and spray them from time to time with water. Fall and winter cauliflower may keep for longer periods since they have stopped growing by the time they are harvested.

COLLARDS

When to plant: Collards are frost hardy and heat tolerant. Sow seeds in early spring for early summer greens and sow in mid-summer for autumn and winter harvest. Generally after a light frost the leaves are sweeter.

Harvesting: Cut off lower leaves, leaving the center of the plant to grow more, or harvest the whole plant at any time.

KALE

When to plant: Sow in early spring for an early summer crop and in late summer for fall and winter crops. The flavor is improved by cold weather.

Harvesting: Pick individual leaves or cut young plants when they are 4-6” tall. They will resprout. Full-grown leaves can be cut and cooked throughout the winter.

KOHLRABI

When to plant: Plant transplants in early to mid-spring for a late spring, early summer harvest and sow seeds in mid-summer for a fall harvest. This vegetable takes 40-60 days to harvest and are best when they can mature in cool weather.

Harvesting: Harvest spring kohlrabi when the stems swell to the size of a tennis ball. Fall kohlrabi will hold in the ground for several weeks even with frost.

LETTUCE

When to plant: There are four different types of lettuce and all of them have different growing requirements. Even though it is a cool season crop, by choosing cold hardy varieties and heat tolerant varieties lettuce can almost be grown year round and with a cold frame or greenhouse it can be.

Leaf lettuce is the easiest to grow and quickly matures 6-8 weeks. This is a good type of lettuce to grow where hot weather quickly follows on the heels of spring.

Butterhead lettuce takes up to 65 days to mature and should be sown in early spring for early summer harvesting and in mid-summer for fall harvesting. With protection, fall planting of hardy varieties will successfully over winter.

Romaine lettuce is sown in mid-summer for a late fall crop. It tastes better when it can mature in cool weather. Takes 80 days to maturity, so a long stretch of cool to moderate weather is needed. Transplants work well when planted in early spring.

Iceberg lettuce takes the longest to mature – up to 90 days. This lettuce usually works better in regions where the summers are cool. However, there are a few heat tolerant varieties. Sow this type of lettuce in mid spring for a fall harvest. Lettuce grown through the summer benefits from plants that will provide shade.

Harvesting: Harvesting is also thinning. Harvest individual leaves of leaf lettuce or cut off the tops of whole plants. They will regrow more leaves. Harvest some outer leaves of butter lettuce, romaine and iceberg lettuces but generally harvest the entire head when it is mature.

SALAD GREENS

When to plant: Salad greens include Mesclun, Arugula, Mache, Endive and Asian greens. All are cool season crops and some can be winter hardy. Generally, it is safe to direct sow these greens in early to mid-spring. Sowing every two weeks assures you a variety of greens through the growing season well into fall. They all tend to bolt in hot weather and get bitter. Plant by taller vegetables which will provide some shade.

Harvesting: Salad greens are harvested in the same manner that leaf lettuce is harvested. Mache is harvested by pinching off leaf clusters after plants have developed a 3” rosette.

SPINACH

When to plant: Seeds can be sown almost all year, although they may not germinate very successfully in the hot temperatures of summer. To achieve a continuous crops start sowing seeds every few weeks from early spring right through early fall. In the winter you will need a cold frame or greenhouse if you wish to grow spinach here during that time.

Harvesting: Spinach is usually ready for harvesting 10-12 weeks after sowing, although you can start cutting young leaves for salads much earlier. As soon as they are about 2” in length, start harvesting the outer leaves. To harvest the whole plant, uproot it completely or cut off the head about 1” above the level of the soil. New leaf shoots should sprout from the stump.

NEW ZEALAND SPINACH

When to plant: New Zealand spinach is a different species but is grown and used the same way as regular spinach. This spinach tolerates high temperatures and dry conditions and is less likely to bolt.

Harvesting: You can usually begin picking the young fleshy leaves as early as 6 weeks after sowing, which can occur in early to mid-spring. They will keep regrowing, so treat the plant as a 'cut and come again' crop that should last right through summer to the first fall frost.

SWISS CHARD

When to plant: Sow in spring and early summer for crops that will last through to mid or late fall. If you have a cold frame or greenhouse, sow in mid or late summer for harvesting in the spring of the following year. Chard tolerates light frost and it rarely bolts to seed in warm weather, so it's a better choice than spinach and many other leafy crops.

Harvesting: Pick young, tender leaves as soon as they are large enough for salads. Early planting should mature 8-10 weeks after sowing. As they become ready, harvest alternate plants in each of your rows to leave more space for those that are left behind. Continue to cut full-grown leaves when you need them.

CELERY

When to plant: Celery and its cousin Celeriac are cool season crops which need a long (4 months) cool growing season. Start seeds early indoors and/or plant transplants early spring. These plants tolerate light frost. Generally, fall crops don't work well here because they will not mature before the really cold weather sets in. If you plan to use a cold frame sow seeds in mid-summer.

Harvesting: Cut celery just below the base individually or full stalk. Celeriac is a root- dig it up when the roots are at least 2" wide.

FENNEL

When to plant: Florence or sweet fennel requires that seeds be started indoors and then transplanted in mid-spring. Fennel takes up to 3 months to form a bulb and in warm weather it bolts quickly into flower and stops growing. The easier way is to sow seeds in mid-summer for a fall crop. Fennel does not tolerate a hard freeze. This perennial herb can be sown directly into the ground in mid to late spring.

Harvesting: To harvest cut each bulb off just above ground level. If there is enough time it will resprout new shoots and small bulbs than can be used in salads and cooking. Fennel leaves can be harvested before it flowers.

PEAS

When to plant: Peas are very cold and frost tolerant. They must flower and set fruit before the temperature reaches 80°. Sow seeds in early spring for a late spring or early summer harvest. In mid-summer sow seeds for harvest in the fall.

Harvesting: Harvest shelling peas when the peas fill the pod and pods are bright green and glossy. Harvest every few days starting at the bottom of the plant and working your way up the plant. Sugar peas should be harvested when the peas just begin to swell into small lumps.

BEETS

When to plant: Beets can be sown in mid-spring for an early summer harvest or in late summer for a fall harvest. Spring planted beets can experience insect problems and bolting if the weather becomes too hot too soon. Fall beets don't experience these problems and the cooler weather makes the mature beets sweeter.

Harvesting: Harvest beet greens as part of the thinning process. Harvest beets when they are golf ball size. The beet greens are also particularly good at this point. Fall crops will hold in the garden until the soil begins to freeze and are often larger. If the bed is covered with a thick layer of straw or bags of leaves this will provide enough insulation so the ground doesn't freeze and harvesting can continue into winter although the greens will not survive.

CARROTS

When to plant: Sow carrot seeds in early spring for a summer crop and in late summer for a fall crop.

Harvesting: Harvest carrots when they reach your favorite eating size: baby carrots 30-40 days after sowing; mature carrots 50-80 days after sowing. Mulching with a thick layer of straw or bags of leaves before the first hard freeze will allow you to continue harvesting carrots well into winter.

PARSNIP

When to plant: Parsnips are among the cold hardiest of vegetables. The sugar content of the parsnip increases after the first frost. Sow parsnip seeds in the spring for a fall harvest.

Harvesting: After 90-130 days parsnips may be lifted with a spading fork and stored for several months in a cool, dark space. Mulch with a thick layer of straw or bags of leaves and they can be left in the ground and harvested as needed all winter long.

RUTABAGA

When to plant: Sow seeds in early to mid-summer. Rutabagas mature at about 90 days. Wait to harvest until after several frosts because chilling improves their flavor.

Harvesting: Dig roots as needed when the roots are about 4" in diameter. As with other root vegetables, rutabagas can be left in the ground and harvested through the winter if heavily mulched.

TURNIP

When to plant: Sow seeds in the early spring for an early summer harvest and in late summer for a fall harvest.

Harvesting: All parts of the turnip are edible. Harvest the greens by picking individual ones or cutting handfuls. New leaves will emerge where they have been harvested. Harvest only a few green leaves from the plants you are growing for winter storage. Dig up the roots when they are about 3” in diameter. Harvest before a hard freeze because they may split and become woody. Store in a cool, damp place.

GARLIC

When to plant: There are two different types of garlic: soft neck and hard neck. Soft neck garlic is the type that is found at the grocery store. Hard neck garlic is suitable for cooler climates and is the type that is grown in Northern Nevada through the winter. Plant the cloves in the fall; Plant garlic starts in early spring.

Harvesting: Generally in late spring or early summer garlic bulbs are ready to harvest. Wait until the leaves start to turn yellow and fade. Let them air dry prior to storage. Hard neck varieties do not store as well so don't expect their shelf life to be like the garlic you purchase at the grocery store.

ONION

When to plant: Onions can be planted from seeds, plant starts, or sets(miniature dormant onions). For late spring to early fall harvest plant any of the above in the early spring. Fall sown onions are ready for harvest in early to mid-summer and are usually planted as sets.

Harvesting: Start pulling scallions as soon as they are large enough to use. For mature onions wait until half of the onion foliage has turned yellow. Then push the rest of the foliage flat to the ground. This will force the onion bulbs to go through their final maturing stage and will ensure longer storage time. About 3 weeks later the onions are ready for harvest. Pull them and leave the onions laying on top of the soil for 4-5 days prior to storing in a cool, dry space with good air circulation.

SHALLOT

When to plant: Plant shallot cloves in early spring.

Harvesting: Harvest shallot bulbs late summer once the leaves have turned yellow and died down. Let them air dry thoroughly prior to storing in a cool, dry area.

Crop Rotation is important for vegetables to help prevent the spread of plant disease. Additionally all plants should be pulled up and discarded or composted after harvesting is complete.