MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y | Extension

Michigan **Fresh**

Starting Seeds

Prepared by:
Linda Whitlock, MSU Extension educator

When to plant

Vegetables susceptible to frost, known as warm-season crops, should not be planted until after the danger of frost.

Many warm-season crops are best planted as seedlings that you have started indoors or have purchased from a garden center. These crops have minimum temperature requirements for growth; in Michigan's relatively short growing season, we can still enjoy a plentiful harvest of these crops by using transplants, rather than starting seeds in the garden.

Cool-season crops may be planted outdoors whenever your soil is ready. To test your soil, pick up a handful and squeeze it. If the soil crumbles when you open your hand, it is ready to plant. If water runs from the soil between your fingers it's too early to plant. Experienced Michigan gardeners often begin planting their cool-season crops during April and early May.

Before you plant

- Loosen the soil by turning it over with a shovel, hoe or tilling it to make it easier for young plants to establish healthy root systems. This is a good time to add compost and starter fertilizer and to moisten the soil if necessary.
- Create planting holes or rows for the seeds.
- Cover the seeds with soil and then gently tamp the soil.
- Mark the rows or blocks carefully to help you remember what you've planted, or draw a map of your garden space.

Warm-season crops	Cool-season crops
Beans	Beets
Cucumbers	Kohlrabi
Melons	Lettuce
Squash	Green peas
Sweet corn	Radishes
	Spinach
	Snap peas

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Planting and maintenance

When planting seeds, do not expect 100 percent germination: weather, insects, soil moisture and soil temperature will all affect the germination rate. You may want to plant seeds closer together than is recommended on the seed packet and then thin plants to the recommended spacing once the seedlings have sprouted and have several pairs of leaves. Plants grown too close together will be stunted and more prone to insect and disease problems.

Remove weeds as they appear, being careful to remove the weeds' roots while leaving the young vegetable seedlings in place. Once the seedlings have several pair of leaves, you may mulch around them to help prevent further weed growth. Good mulch choices include wood chips, pine straw, clean straw, grass clippings, leaves and compost.

Remember to water the soil to maintain 1 inch of water per week for healthy crop development. Using a rain gauge will help you measure how much water your plants are getting.

References

Wilson, J.W. (2009). Homegrown Vegetables, Fruits and Herbs. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Creative Homeowner.

Fizzell, J.A. (2007). Guide to Michigan Vegetable Gardening. Brentwood, Tennessee: Cool Spring Press.

Vegetable Gardening in the Midwest. (2002) University of Illinois Extension, Champaign, Illinois.

Find out more about Michigan Fresh at
msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/mi_fresh.