

Gardening: Sequential Planting through the Seasons

by Catherine Haug

Better Homes and Gardens Magazine, April 2010 issue, included an interesting article titled "Planning and Planting." The premiss of the article is to plant for the season: spring, summer and fall, to maximize the productivity of a small garden space (such as [Square Foot Gardening](#)). And, as described in The Winter Harvest Handbook by Eliot Coleman, and Paul Renner's recent gathering on [Peaceful Gardens Year-Round Food Production Facility](#), one can even plant through the winter if a greenhouse (or cold frame) is available.

The BH&G article illustrates the same bed, with plantings in each season. I expand upon this information, with what I've been learning over the last year or so. My sequence begins with Spring (NOW!) and goes through Winter.

Spring

Before the last frost date, as soon as soil is workable, it's time to plant cool-season crops. For some of us in the Flathead – those who get lots of early spring sun – this will be in early March. Otherwise, this will be later in March.

What to pull:

Pull overwintering crops, and prepare soil for the new season of planting.

What to retain:

If you planted garlic, lettuce & spinach the previous fall, they will start growing in earnest in spring.

If you saved your chard over the winter in a cold frame or greenhouse, you can transplant it to your garden in the spring.

What & when to plant:

Cool-season crops include lettuce, spinach, salad mixes, peas, chard, carrots, parsnips, radishes, turnips & rutabagas; also most greens such as kale, cabbage, broccoli, Asian greens, etc..

The following can be started indoors in later winter, for later transplant to the gardens:

- beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, turnips, and lettuce.

Hardy to a hard freeze, so first to be planted, as soon as soil can be worked:

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- when soil temperature is above 50°F: **pea, radish, spinach, brussels sprouts (as transplants), dry onions**. Note: Peas like a climbing structure.
- when soil temperature is above 65°F: **green onion**

Semi-hardy to frost, so plant 2 weeks or so before last frost day (plant first two weeks in May, here), or prepare to cover when hard frost is predicted:

- when soil temperature is above 50°F: **beets, carrot, cauliflower (as transplants), lettuce, parsnips, potatoes; turnips** can be planted 3-weeks before hard frost.
- when soil temperature is above 65°F: **chard**

Consider creating [natural garden hoops](#) from Serviceberry or other native shrub branches to support your covers.

Summer

Summer, in gardening terms, means after the last frost date, which for us is between May 15 and May 31.

What to pull:

Several of your cool-season crops will start to bolt when the weather heats up and the hours of daylight maximize, typically in mid – late June. This is the time to pull up the bolted veggies and plant new crops that are very tender to frost (see below) in their place.

- Pull up spent lettuce & spinach that are ready to bolt
- Harvest radishes & turnips before they get woody.

If you planted garlic the previous fall (see below), you can harvest the scapes in the early summer (mid – late June), but leave the bulb and leaves until mid summer (mid-July or August). At that time, dig up the bulbs with the stems and dry for storage. See [Harvesting & Growing Garlic](#) for more detail.

[NOTE: if you intend to [Save the Seeds](#) from your heirloom cool weather crops, you will not be able to replant in their place until late summer/fall.]

What to retain:

Chard can remain in the garden through all 3 seasons (and even through the winter if you cover your bed with a cold frame). **Cabbage** & certain other **greens** may remain hardy through the hot season.

Many spring crops: **peas, beets, cabbage family, carrots, and onions** will continue to grow until harvest in June or early July.

Potatoes planted in spring won't mature until August or early September

Climbing structure used by spring peas can be reused by summer's pole beans & cucumbers, so leave those structures in place.

What & when to plant:

In the space vacated by your spring crops, plant warm season crops that need warmer temperatures and long hours of daylight. Best time to plant is when soil temperature is above 65°F.

Many summer veggies can be started indoors in April, so are ready for transplant after the last frost date. "Wall of water" blankets work well for tomatoes, to moderate temperatures in their immediate environment, until they are well-established outdoors.

Tender to frost; plant about 1 week after last frost (May 25 – June 8, here):

- **Peppers (as transplants), beans, corn**

Very tender to frost; plant 2–3 weeks after last frost date (June 1 – 15, here):

- **Cucumber, eggplant & tomato (as transplants), summer squash, pumpkin & winter squash, melons.**

Fall

As summer wanes, nights become too cool for most heat-loving nightshades, and your beans will be mostly spent (unless you are saving the dried pods for dried beans or future plantings).

Some cool weather crops such as turnips and rutabagas do better in fall than spring, because spring's increasingly warming weather cuts short their growth and produces a less flavorful root. However, the greens are excellent in either season.

What to pull:

Remove most summer crops to make room for 2nd planting of cool-season crops.

Early September: pull peppers, eggplant, cucumbers and beans that will not thrive into the fall. If your tomatoes are still producing, you can leave them in place until after the first frost, typically in late September.

What to retain:

The chard should still be a viable crop through the fall, and even into early winter, if covered. Some tomatoes may continue to produce up until the first frost, typically late September.

Dry onions and brussels sprout, pumpkin and winter squash from spring and summer planting will not mature until fall.

Some cabbages from spring plantings can remain even after the first frost; some can even over-winter (see below, and check the seed packages for this).

What & when to plant:

In late August, consider early starting of seeds in flats in a cool space for later transplant:

- **beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, [rutabagas](#) & [turnips](#), cabbage, cauliflower, chard, and lettuce.**

In the space vacated by the summer crops, short-season cool weather crops will do well planted in **early September** (for fall harvest):

- **carrot, lettuce & salad mixes, green onions, parsnips, radishes, spinach , turnips.**
- The BH&G article suggests also **brussels sprouts & broccoli**, but these may not mature before winter, so be prepared to cover them with plastic to mimic a cold frame.

Chard can be planted, then moved to a cold frame or greenhouse to overwinter.

After first frost (typically late September/early October, here) and you've removed your tomatoes: plant garlic, lettuce & spinach in their place; mulch well. The garlic will form good roots over the winter, then sprout in the spring. The lettuce & spinach may sprout in the fall, but will survive through the winter if mulched well, to produce your earliest spring crop. See [Fall Planting of Veggies](#).

Winter

Not many veggies will produce during our cold winters without a heated greenhouse. However, you can transplant your chard to a pot and it will continue to produce through the winter in a cold frame or greenhouse. Jeffrey F. had good luck with this, after he built his greenhouse (see [Gathering Summary: Root Cellars, Gardens & Greenhouses \(June 24, 2009\)](#))

Over-Wintering

Some cool-season crops can be left in the garden to over-winter, if mulched well. This includes cabbage and carrots. However, beware of burrowing animals such as voles and gophers, who may steal your over-wintering crops.

Also, as mentioned in the Fall section above, young garlic, lettuce and spinach crops can over-winter to produce early spring delights.

Cold Frames & Greenhouses

Cold frames came into use in Europe in the mid-late 1800s, to produce cool-season crops such as cabbage, broccoli, salad greens, lettuce & spinach through the winter. Since those early cold frames, the technique has been greatly refined; see gardeners.com for ideas.

SavvyGardener.com provides lots of good information on cold frames & hot houses, tunnels and row covers for winter crops.

See also [The Winter harvest Handbook](#) by Eliot Coleman, or [Cold Frames and Hot Bed](#). See Resources, below for more info on these resources

Resources

From The EssentialList:

- [Garden Hoops from Natural Materials](#)
- [Harvesting & Growing Garlic](#)
- [Saving & Storing Seeds](#)
- [Fall Planting of Veggies](#)
- [Gathering Summary: Root Cellars, Gardens & Greenhouses \(June 24, 2009\)](#)
- [Potatoes: Planting, Growing & Harvesting](#)

From other web sources:

- [Square Foot Gardening \(www.squarefootgardening.com\)](http://www.squarefootgardening.com)
- Gardeners.com; and [Kitchen Garden Planner](#) for Square Foot Gardens
- SavvyGardener.com
- Mother Earth News, on Cold Frames & Winter Harvest: [Use Cold Frames to Grow More Food](#), [Evolution of a Winter Harvest](#), [A Garden for All Seasons](#), and [Information & Advice on Home Garden Greenhouses](#)
- Mother Earth News: [When & How to Plant Potatoes](#)
- Mother Earth News: [About Turnips & Rutabagas](#) and [Triumphant Turnips](#)

From Books & Magazines:

- Better Homes and Gardens Magazine, April 2010 issue
- The Winter Harvest handbook –i Year–round Vegetable Production Using Deep–Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses by Eliot coleman, Chelsea Green Publishing, March 2009 (see [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com/Winter-Harvest-Handbook-Production-Greenhouses/dp/1603580816) for sneak–peak inside the book
(www.amazon.com/Winter-Harvest-Handbook-Production-Greenhouses/dp/1603580816)
- The Montana Gardener’s Companion: An Insiders Guide to Gardening under the Big Sky, by Bob Gough & Cheryl Moore–Gough, Morris Book Publishing, LLC (used for information on frost hardiness in this article)
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