



THE WINTER GARDEN

Garden Topics and Tasks
Presented by Shari Petrucci



WELCOME TO FEBRUARY

Chapter 2 of the Winter Garden Series

Topics



- Make a Planting Guide. What are you going to grow?
- Design Your Garden in Your Journal
- Plan Container Garden.
- Test Last Year's Seeds for Viability
- Purchase New Seeds
- Replenish and Clean Seed Starting Supplies

Making a Planting Guide

I get so excited thinking about what I'm going to grow this year and I can't wait to make my list! Of course, there are my go-to veggies and herbs that I plant every year. Then there is something new, something I've never grown before. One year it was Brussel sprouts, another, the Chinese Bok Choy, a Chinese white cabbage.

Due to seed shortages, remember to grow only what you will consume for your household size. Only grow what you can manage within your time frame. If you're a beginner, start out small and work your way up over the seasons. This includes growing vegetables in pots.

Pots are great for growing veggies and herbs. They don't take up much space and it's amazing the amount of produce you can grow. Even if you have a yard but want to keep gardening as simple as possible, pots are in easy reach when you want to pluck a tomato or snip some thyme!

There's so much to think about, it can easily feel overwhelming. As I begin, I start with my foundation vegetables and herbs. These are what I want plenty of and therefore may take up more room in my small garden. List what you want to grow and when they should be planted in the garden. Using the planting guide with your list, you will be able to figure out what to plant first.

**When you click on the links below, a new window will open in the browser you are using.
You can download and print the journal documents and your planting guide to put in your journal.**

[Garden Journal Printable's](#)

[Planting Guide](#)

Sketching Your Design

When drawing your garden layout, start with **cold crops** such as lettuces, spinach, Asian cabbages, radish, and bunching onions. These will be planted into the garden as early as the soil is workable and amended. You will be planting your choices either by direct sowing seeds, indoor seedlings to transplant, or purchased plants from a garden center. I am usually able to plant the cold crops by the end of March as long as the soil is workable, leaving room to add more plants later.

Intermediate crops are those that would be planted in between cold and warm weather. My favorites are cucumbers, zucchini and beans. From my own experience I've learned to plant the vining vegetables at the edge of the garden. This way I can control where the runners go around the outside edge and have an easy reach for a ripe cucumber. I also only plant 1 or 2 zucchini plants. You can only give away so much zucchini before your friends see you coming and start to disappear! My favorite **warm crop** picks are tomatoes and peppers. These are planted last into the garden towards the end of May. I like to plant the tomatoes in the middle and the peppers around them with annual herbs in between such as parsley, cilantro, and basil. These grow great together as companion plants. Make sure to include the perennial herbs like thyme and sage. These can become bushy towards the end of summer so I plant them in the corners or sides of the garden bed.



Pots, pots and more pots!



Growing a plentiful selection of veggies and herbs are not restricted to growing them in a garden plot. Many of today's gardeners choose to grow their choices in pots! Whether you have a balcony, deck or patio, growing your food in pots can be just as rewarding. There are many benefits too!

Pots can be located in a nearby sunny location to an entryway to your home. They are less apt to succumb to disease and pest problems, or at least sooner and easier to spot than if they were planted further out in a garden. Watering is more manageable and less time consuming. Just remember that pots require more watering than gardens in the ground.

When looking for pots make sure there are holes in the bottom for drainage. If the pots fill up with too much water for a long time, the roots of your vegetables will probably rot. Also, a white powdery substance may appear on the vegetable leaves from too much humidity rising from the soil known as powdery mildew.

Books To Read About Growing Vegetables In Pots

[Grow vegetables in pots](#)

[Grow your own vegetables in pots and containers : a practical guide to growing food in small spaces](#)

[The no-garden gardener : creating gardens on patios, balconies, terraces, and in other small spaces](#)

[How to grow your own food : an illustrated beginner's guide to container gardening](#)



Seed Viability

If you have seeds leftover from last year, you might want to test them for viability before planting them. Depending on the type of vegetable or herb, the seed may only be good for 1 year while others may be perfectly viable for longer periods of time. By knowing what seeds you have left that will grow, you will only have to purchase the seeds you need.

What you need:

- Old seeds
- Paper towels
- Resealable plastic baggies
- Sharpie marker for labeling

Begin Testing

- Dampen the paper towel— it doesn't need to be dripping wet, just nice and soggy. Arrange the seeds on the paper towel. **Use 10 seeds of each type**, as it makes figuring the percentage easy, and ensures you're getting a random sampling of the packet.
- Roll up the paper towel and place the damp towel/seeds in a plastic bag, seal, and set aside in a warm place. Label the bag with the sharpie.
- Depending on the type of seeds you're testing, they should begin to germinate anywhere from 2-14 days. (*Seeds like peas and beans will sprout faster, while seeds like carrots or parsnips will take much longer*). If your seeds are of the slow-germinating variety, you may need to spritz the paper towel with more water to keep it damp. If it dries out, the seeds will stop the germination process.
- Once the seeds begin to sprout, give them a day or two, and then take note as to how many sprouted vs. how many did not sprout. This will give you a germination rate.

Germination Rate:

1 seed sprouts = 10% germination rate,
5 seeds sprout = 50% germination rate
10 seeds sprout = 100% germination rate

The higher the germination rate, the better. Anything over 50% is good to use. Anything lower than 50% still might be usable, but you may need to plant more seeds to potentially make up for the "duds." Don't throw out the bad seeds. Seeds that are no good can be used in birdfeeders!



Purchase Your Seeds!

When all is said and done I purchase the seeds I need for my garden either on-line or at garden centers. Purchase only what you need basically for this coming growing season. Leftovers can be stored indoors in an airtight container for the following year.

Once I get my seeds I refer to my planting guide in my journal. I read over each seed packet to note onto the planting guide when I should start the seeds, organizing them on paper into groups for cold, intermediate, and warm weather crops.

Check out this link on how to read seed packs by Nan Schiller

[How to Read Seed Packets](#)



Get Your Seed Starting Supplies!

I love shopping for seed starting and garden supplies. First+ on my list are the seeds.

Then I wash and dry and set up last years reusable seed trays It's very important to start with clean materials to help prevent disease setting into the soil bed. I make news paper seed pots and place them in a foil tray.

Then I move on to garden twine to support tomatoes and peppers when they're in the ground. Then I get new gardening tools to replace the ones that I noted were broken or missing.

There are many different types of seed starting supplies you can use ranging from foil trays with holes punched in the bottom with a skewer resting on a cookie sheet, homemade paper pots, or store bought seed starting cells with a cover.



So Who Gardens In February ?

We Do! There is so much to read, list, draw, and set up that for me February is never a dull month. I especially love sitting near a window on a sunny day planning my perfect dream garden. (*Trying not to get carried away*) If time management is an issue, try focusing on 1 or 2 tasks a week. After all, there is so so much to do in February



When March arrives, I will introduce...

- Seed starting
- Soil Texture, Structure, and PH
- Garden Bed Preparation
- Garden Shows

Till then...Happy Gardening!