



THE WINTER GARDEN

Garden Topics and Tasks
Presented by Shari Petrucci



WELCOME TO MARCH

Chapter 3 of the Winter Garden Series

Topics

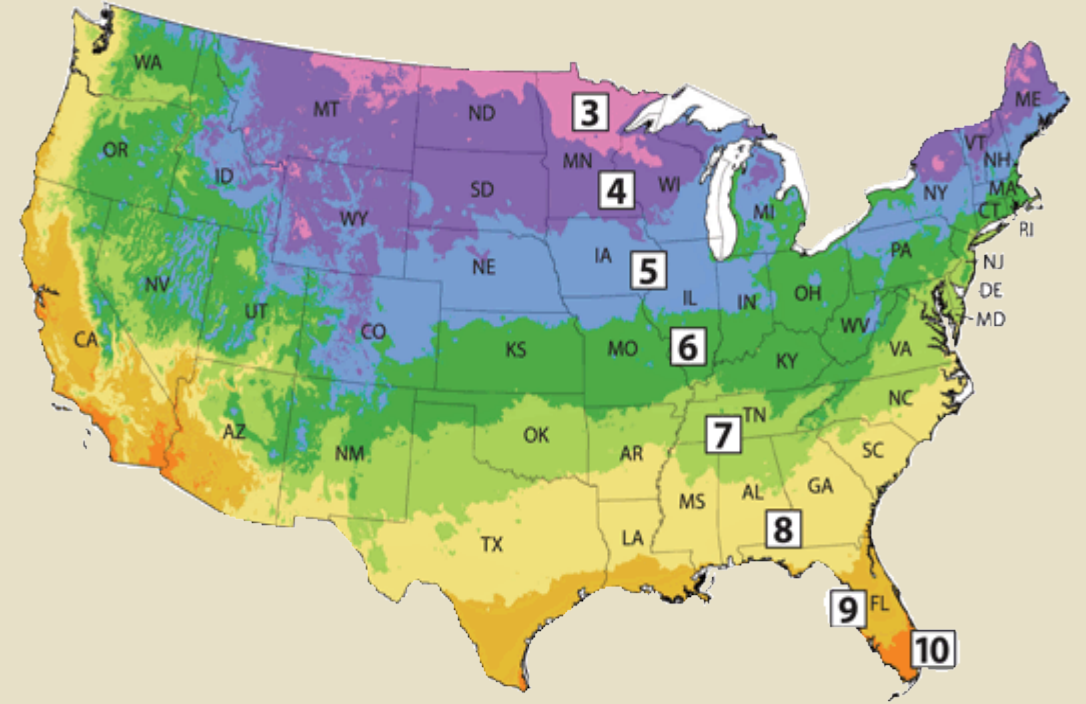


- Planting Zones and Frost Dates
- What Do I Plant First?
- Seed Starting Soil
- Gather the supplies
- Planting Seeds
- Garden Shows

Zones

What do planting zones mean?

Hardiness zones were developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to determine the plants that grow best in the climate where you live. Each zone represents the region's minimum average winter temperatures.



Frost Dates

The Frost Date is actually shorthand for **two dates: First Frost and Last Frost**. These are the average dates when frost is first or last expected in a certain area. These are averages, not guarantees. But they can be helpful when determining planting times, and when planning a final harvest and fall cleanup. Find your average frost date by clicking on the link below

[Our Average frost dates](#)

There's no such thing as *in like a lion and out like a lamb* when it comes to gardening in March!

Gather up your indoor seed starting supplies.

- Growing containers-
- Seed starting soil
- Seeds
- Spray bottle for water
- Large bowl
- Popsicle sticks
- Sharpie pen

Now set yourself up at a newspaper covered table, have a seat, and begin.....



Seed Growing Medium

When planting seeds in containers, you should always use soil that is designed for growing seeds. Typically it is a soil-less mix comprised of 4 parts compost, 1 part perlite, 1 part vermiculite, and 2 parts Peat moss. When you are growing a lot of seeds, it might be more cost efficient to make your own mix. You can use the recipe above. There are many varieties of brands of seed starter mix in bags at most stores that carry gardening supplies.

You're asking, "How can a plant grow without soil?" A seedling doesn't need soil because, for the first week or two of its life, it will get its nutrients from the seed. Compost, a key ingredient in a seed-starting mix, will take over once the seed is done and feed the seedlings as they grow.

Another reason seed-starting mix is so much better than soil: Your seedlings won't be exposed to mold or fungi. Soil can hold too much moisture and cause a condition called damping off, a fungal disease that makes seedlings wither where their stem meets the soil. When that happens, they'll die. You'll get better growth and happier seedlings with a soil-less mix.



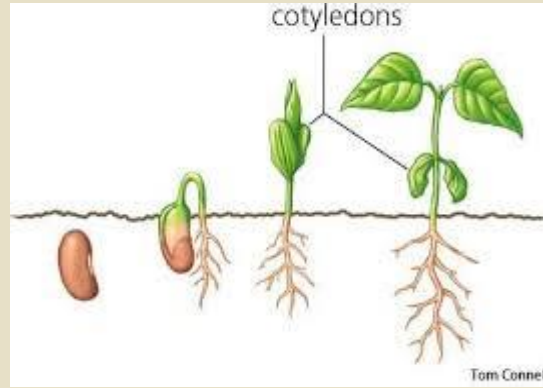
What Do I Plant First?

There are key factors to consider before planting seeds indoors. We will follow the northeast planting schedule for Zone 6 in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts. Start the seeds 4 to 6 weeks before the average last frost date in your area. Read the back of the seed packets to determine days till germination. Write this in your journal and the day the seeds were planted next to the seed name.

Example: Swiss Chard Planted indoors March 3 Days to Germinate 5 to 7 days Sprout Date: March 9th

Some seeds do not transplant well and should be direct sown in the garden bed. Set these seeds aside for now. They can be direct sown when the garden soil is workable. Then separate the rest of your seeds into two groups based on the climate of the growing season, cold and warm crops. Start planting the cold crop seeds early in March. Plant the warm crop seeds late in the month.

Indoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Cold Crops (early in month)	Warm Crops (late in month)	Direct Sow (When Soil is Workable)
Basil	Chervil	Beets
Broccoli	Chicory	Carrots
Brussels Sprouts	Cilantro	Green Onions
Cabbage	Eggplant	Lettuce
Cauliflower	Fennel	Peas
Celery	Parsley	Radishes
Kale	Peppers	Spinach
Mint	Summer Savory	Turnips
Oregano	Tomatoes	
Swiss Chard		



Germination Date

As the sprout appears, mark the date next to the seed name in your journal. From this date you can calculate how many days to maturity give or take a couple.

Everything depends on the amount of light, average temperature, and watering schedule.

True leaves vs Seed Leaves

A “true” leaf is one that can perform photosynthesis, the process plants use to make their own food. When a seedling sprouts, the first leaves that appear are not “true” leaves, but rather “**cotyledons**” or seed leaves. They sometimes still have the seed coat on their tip as they grow upwards.

Seed Identification

As the seeds begin to sprout their “**cotyledons**” will all look similar. This is why it’s important to label the seed trays. Once their true leaves begin to develop, you will notice their specific shapes. But, it can still be very difficult to differentiate between some of them such as tomatoes from marigolds.

Leggy Seedlings

The most common cause of legginess is an **insufficient or uneven access to light**. When the light source is too dim or distant, seedlings grow quickly in height to get closer to that light. ... “They get leggy because they're looking for the light, so a lot of times you'll see them bending towards the light.

Planting Seeds

Put some growing mix into a large bowl and spray just till damp with a spray bottle filled with water. Mix together. Then spoon the mix into the containers you chose to grow them in. Tamp down lightly to force pockets of air out. Plant 2 or 3 seeds of the same variety into each container. Plant them to the depth recommended on the back of the seed packet.

I like to wear plastic gloves for this to keep my nails clean and to prevent transferring any chance of contamination to the seeds. I use a chopstick to push them down. Some seeds are so small you merely sprinkle them on top of the mix and slightly cover them with more. Spray the containers one more time and set near a warm sunny window or under grow lights on a rack. The containers should have holes in the bottom to allow excess water to drain. The containers should sit on a tray of some kind to collect water. Seedlings that sit in water will die.

Label the seeds to remember what is what.

Note in your journal what you planted and the date.

Now observe and moisten as needed. Journal their germination date!



Garden & Flower Shows Provide Inspiration For Spring

While winter may not be the best season to work outside in your garden, it is the perfect time to explore new ideas for spring. The first quarter of the new year is one of the busiest throughout the country for garden and flower symposiums and expos. There's plenty to see and do at these events whether you're an experienced gardener, or just getting started: learn about new and different plants, how to make ponds and water features even more beautiful, ideas for creating unusual container combinations, or how to use stone in the garden to make a bench. The highlight of most garden and flower shows are the fully landscaped demonstration gardens. The impressive displays make it easy to imagine the full potential of your own yard and are a refreshing break from the winter weather outside. These garden displays include outdoor dining ideas, landscaping with water and provide information on how to deal with difficult terrain. The designers of the display gardens love to talk with attendees on how to incorporate their ideas into your unique situation.

Explore the marketplaces, where you'll find numerous vendors selling and displaying all manner of horticultural items in exhibitor booths with a variety of choices from arbors to violets and everything in between.

Attend a seminar about a new or interesting topic. Almost all symposiums and expos offer an array of superb speakers who enlighten you and open your mind to new horticultural ideas from topics that range from "Arthritis in the Garden" to "Gardening for Your Pets" to "Insects in the Garden".

No matter your skill level, these outings are a gardener's treat. They can even be turned into an overnight "short break" for a not-too-close destination. Once you start attending these events, you'll likely look forward to them each year for the inspiration and camaraderie they offer.

[Capital District Garden & Flower Show](#)

[Connecticut Flower & Garden Show](#)

[Maine Flower Show](#)

[Mount Holyoke Annual Flower Show](#)

[Philadelphia Flower Show](#)

[Smith College Spring Bulb Show](#)

[Tower Hill Botanic Garden](#)

[World Floral Expo 2022](#)

[Click here to visit](#)

[Western Massachusetts Master Gardener Association website for more information on all your gardening questions !](#)



THIS CONCLUDES OUR WINTER GARDEN SERIES

We hope you enjoyed it !
Click below for past presentations

[Winter Garden Series](#)