



Start Planning Your Spring and Summer Garden Now!

By Zack Dowell

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

It's that time of year -- time to start thinking about starting seeds for your spring and summer vegetable garden. Why? Because starting spring and summer vegetables indoors from seed is easy, economical, and gives you access to thousands of unique varieties of your favorite vegetables, many that you won't find in the nursery.

Though many vegetables can be seeded directly in the garden once the soil warms up later in the spring, early spring vegetables, including broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and lettuce, can be seeded indoors in January and February, while tomatoes and peppers are typically started indoors in February and March. Sources for vegetable seeds include nurseries, catalogs, websites, and local seed libraries.

Plant seeds into a clean seed starting mix, rather than into soil from your garden, which can contain fungus and other pathogens that can cause problems for young plants. Seed starting mix can be found at any garden store, and typically contains some combination of peat, perlite, shredded fir bark, vermiculite, and sand.

Seeds and seedlings need the right temperature, moisture, and light to germinate and grow strong and healthy. A greenhouse or sunny windowsill can provide the right conditions for optimal germination and early growth. Seed packets provide information about ideal conditions for germination, sunlight requirements, and plant spacing for each specific vegetable. You'll also find a packing date on the seed packet. If your seeds are more than a few years old, put one or two extra into each planting container to account for the fact that older seeds tend to germinate at lower rates than do fresher seeds. Be patient, as some spring and summer vegetable seeds, notably peppers, can be slow to germinate.

Once your seedlings have emerged, be sure that they have adequate light, without which they'll stretch out and grow spindly. Cool, damp conditions make young seedlings especially susceptible to damping-off fungus (see the UC IPC Pest Note for Damping-off Disease: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74132.html>), so be sure seedlings have adequate air

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circulation, and make sure to water just enough to keep the soil damp but not soggy. Seedlings will appreciate a balanced, diluted fertilizer once their true leaves emerge to help them grow strong in preparation for transplanting. Before planting them out in the garden, seedlings will need to be hardened off, which is a process of exposing them slowly to their eventual outdoor home. A week or two before you intend to plant out, place your seedlings in filtered (not direct) sunlight for a few hours a day, bringing them in at night and slowly increasing the time they spend outside.

If you follow these simple guidelines, you'll be ready to plant a bountiful spring and summer garden.

Want to learn more about growing spring and summer vegetables? Master Gardener Zack Dowell will discuss garden plant selection, planting times, site selection, soil preparation, proper seed planting techniques, and pest management in an online class on January 30 from 9:00 – 10:30 AM. Please register in advance for this class at <https://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=32829>.

Due to the pandemic, Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future continue to be limited. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we are doing our best to provide virtual learning opportunities. You can find our new online class schedule at: http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698, and recorded classes on many gardening topics here: https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Public_Education_Classes/Handouts_-_Presentations/.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open on the first and second Saturdays of the month 9-noon. We are limited the number of people allowed in the garden at one time, masks and distancing are required. Please check our website for more details https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Demonstration_Garden/

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.