

Adding Green to Your Garden Right Now

Lemoine Waite, Master Gardener, January 3, 2023

Q: My New Year's resolution is to add more fresh veggies to my diet. What are some vegetables that I can start growing right now?

A: Here is a list of fast growing vegetables that you can start eating in a little over a month. Many of the quickest growing vegetables are also cool season vegetables so now-until late March is the perfect time to be planting many of them. Cool season vegetables are plants that grow best when temperatures are cooler and most will withstand some frost. The times given below are for plants started from seed but things can be sped up if you use plant starts. Staggering seeding so that you plant a few plants every couple of weeks can extend harvest and allow you to have small amounts of fresh greens over a longer period of time.

Arugula-30 to 40 days. This is a peppery salad green, it can also be used as a substitute for basil in pesto.

Beets-40 to 70 days. Harvest early for greens or leave longer to harvest the roots.

Broccoli Raab, Rapini-40 to 60 days-The leaves, stems and flower buds can all be eaten either raw or in stir-fry.

Carrots-36 to 55 days- The time to harvest deepens on variety, these can be harvested as baby carrots or let grow to full size.

Cress-25-35 days-Can add peppery flavor for salads and sandwiches.

Kale-30 to 65 days- Baby greens are tender and can be used in salads and smoothies. Older leaves can be cooked as greens.

Leaf Luttuce-35 to 50 days- Harvest as baby greens or let grow into larger leaves. Will need protection from frost.

Mesclun Greens-21 to 30 days-These are a mix of 6 to 10 seeds that grow fast, usually arugula, chervil, oak leaf, and mâche but can include many other leafy greens, it is what you find in the packaged "Spring Mix" in stores. Will need to be protected from freezing temperatures.

Mustard-21 to 45 days-Spicy greens for stir-fry or soup.

Peas-50 to 60 days-Pea shoots can also be harvested earlier. Plants will need to be protected from hard frosts.

Radishes-21-30 days-Tops can also be eaten early. Lots of fun shapes and colors can be fun to grow, Watermelon Radish is my personal favorite.

Spinach-30 to 55 days-baby greens can be harvested for salad greens. Plants will need frost protection.

Swiss Chard-30 to 60 days-Can use baby greens or let grow for larger leaves. This plant will also take the summer heat and keep growing all season

Turnips-35 to 50 days-Both the tops and roots can be eaten.

A couple important notes:

First, growth rates and time to harvest will vary by plant variety so pay attention to the days to harvest when selecting seeds.

Another factor that determines how fast the plants will be ready to harvest is soil temperature. Soil temperatures make a big difference on how fast seed germinates and plants grow. For the cool season crops listed below the ideal soil temperatures are between 50 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Starting seed indoors, using a plant cloches, cold frames or frost cloth can speed up growth and protect plants from hard frosts.

Many of these plants can also be planted in containers which can be moved around to get the most sun or brought inside at night to keep plants warmer and protected from cold. And as temperatures get hotter, the container can be moved into the shade to extend growing season into the summer.