

Seeding and Transplanting Outdoors

Moving Outdoors

Most flowers require at least 8 hours of light each day. This light should be the morning sun from sunrise till noon, as this is the time of day when plants put on the most growth. A full sun area with a good southern exposure is ideal. Select a site which is close to the garden shed or barn, a water source and one that is not too far from the house.

Planting Time

Most gardeners wait until *after the risk of all frost* to plant their gardens. Frost dates are very specific for each region. Know your area; low-lying gardens will tend to get the first frosts. Another indication of when to plant is once the soil warms up to 65°F (18°C), or when small weed seedlings start to emerge from the soil. Some varieties of seed can be planted as soon as the ground can be worked in the spring.

Preparing the Garden

Getting the garden soil prepared is one of the most important chores of gardening. This growing guide makes reference to adding organic matter, either in the form of compost or well-rotted manure to the garden prior to planting. Organic matter helps to loosen or fluff up the soil to allow for better water and air movement, attracts beneficial soil organisms such as worms and bacteria and supplies a slow release source of essential nutrients. It is recommended to add a 2-4" layer of organic matter and then incorporate by mixing to a 6-8" depth. For some home gardeners large amounts of compost or even manure may not be readily available. Some alternatives which can be purchased at Garden Centers include Peat Moss, Composted Sheep or Cattle Manure, Top Soil and Compost.

The best use of space in the garden is to prepare raised beds which are usually 3-4 feet wide and can be any length. The width is important because of the bending and stretching you will have to do to work in the garden. Raised beds have other benefits as well. The soil warms up faster, has better drainage and has a deeper tilth for growing root crops like carrots and potatoes.

Fertilizers

Organic fertilizers come from a natural source like bone meal or green sand. These fertilizers release the nutrients slowly over a long period of time and often contain many micro-nutrients essential for plant growth. **Inorganic fertilizers** are manufactured, provide a quick boost to the plant and do not have any micro-nutrients in their make up. However, both types of fertilizer can work in the garden soil as long as they are applied according to instructions as to prevent a toxicity or deficiency in the soil. Compost has some nutritional value but is primarily used to add organic matter, improving the structure and quality of any soil.

Liquid fertilizers are used as a supplement food for plants during the growing season. Most plants benefit from regular feedings of a water soluble fertilizer such as compost tea or granular type like Plant Prod 20-20-20. Follow instructions for the frequency of feeding.

Tip: Epsom salts are made up of a magnesium compound, plants use magnesium to help take up other essential nutrients such as nitrogen.

Direct Seeding

When direct seeding, over seed to ensure you will have sufficient germination. After germination, thin seedlings to the desired spacing. Follow the instructions on the back of the package. A trick for direct seeding outside when the conditions are hot and dry, is to plant in the evening. Open the drill and water the soil, plant the seed and then cover the seed over. This usually works well for summer planting to ensure rapid and even germination. Transplant tomatoes, peppers or any other vegetable to its desired spacing. To get more from your garden, try direct seeding early maturing crops like radish and leaf lettuce or one of the companion crops, under your transplants, these crops can be harvested before the transplants get too large.

Mulching plants helps to conserve and hold moisture in the soil, retards weed growth, and depending on the crop, keeps the soil warm or cool. Various types of mulches include straw, leaves, grass clippings or a thick layer of compost. Black plastic mulches are used to draw heat into the soil for crops like tomatoes, peppers and melons, which love a long warm season. Flower beds are generally mulched with shredded bark mulch no thicker than 2". Keep mulch away from stems and crowns to prevent rotting. A winter mulch can be applied to protect newly planted or tender perennials. This can be straw, evergreen boughs, leaves or eelgrass.

Transplanting Outdoors

Gradually adjust your plants to outside conditions over a period of a week or two. First place them outside on a warm, calm day in the shade for a few hours. Work up to more sun, wind, and cooler temperatures and finally leave out overnight. Permanently place or plant them outside after your last spring frost date. Check moisture levels everyday, and water when necessary. Continue to fertilize throughout the season. Watch out for the usual insect pests: whiteflies, aphids, thrips, and spider mites.