

Sowing Hope: Grow More Food Across the Seasons

Meg McAndrews Cowden, *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat*

- The earlier you start planting seeds outdoors, the longer your growing season. Start with frost-hardy, cold tolerant quick vegetables.
- Your growing season begins when your soil temperatures are warm enough, the day length has increased, and the soils are not super saturated.
- The more you lean into brassicas, radishes, and leafy greens, the sooner you'll be eating fresh from your garden in late Winter and early Spring from direct-seeded, fast-maturing crops.
- Mid- to late February in temperate northern zones would be an appropriate time to start direct-seeding cold hardy vegetables for extra early harvests, setting your garden beds up for an extended growing season on both ends of the season.
- For colder climates, use season extending methods to create microclimates that are amenable to planting - cold frames, low tunnels, etc
- Worth the effort: The more we push our early season, the sooner the beds open up in late spring and early summer, and this keeps our options wide open for what we succession plant after these first successions mature.

Minimum Temperatures for Direct Seeding:

40-45F	45-50F
Arugula	Beans
Brassicas	Beets
Cilantro	Carrots
Mustard Greens	Corn
Onions	Peas
Radishes	
Spinach	

- When testing soil temperatures, use a digital meat thermometer to check the depth at which you will plant the seed or transplant. For example, for radish or spinach seeds, I'm interested in the top 1" of soil, while for tomato transplants I'm looking for a minimum of 55-60 degrees at 6" deep.
- For places where the ground freezes solid, you can hasten the spring thaw by adding row cover in late winter to help bring spring to the garden several weeks earlier.
- Soil temperature in concert with soil saturation are your keys to unlocking the early growing season

Maximizing your Seasons: Interplanting your Understory

- Your primary crop in any space is your overstory, the top height at which the space will mature
- Stagger crops by pairing lower-growing leafy greens with slower maturing brassicas or beans
- Be wary of the tendency to plant things too close together: interplant, don't overplant
- When interplanting with brassicas, keep a minimum of 24" row spacing
- When given ample spacing, it's possible to get multiple successions in the understory while the overstory matures. Here are some examples of what to interplant:

Overstory & Understory Interplanting Combinations

	Cabbage	Broccoli	Peas	Kale	Pole Beans	Tomatoes
Radishes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cilantro	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Arugula	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spinach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mustard Greens			✓	✓	✓	
Beets	✓				✓	
Head lettuce		✓			✓	✓
Rapini			✓		✓	
Bok choy				✓		
Carrots			✓	✓		

Flower Power Adding flowers to the understory of vining crops in your summer garden is a fantastic method to add diversity to your gardens, bring in the pollinators, and bring abundant color to the space while tying it all together with a few key flowers. My favorites include alyssum, nasturtium, calendula, and gem marigolds. Read more in my book, *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat*.



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