

In The Dirt: January NC

January in the NC Piedmont/Foothills is the quietest month for direct-seeding — deep winter, average last frost still 3+ months away, so outdoor seeding is essentially off the table.

Direct-seed outdoors: basically none

- Soil is too cold for germination of almost anything. Skip outdoor seeding this month.

Exception — very late January in a mild stretch:

- Some gardeners sneak in peas or spinach in the last week of January under row cover or in a cold frame, but this is optimistic even for this region. Waiting for February is more reliable.

What actually happens in January:

- Indoor seed starting — this is the real January task. Onions are often started indoors under lights in early-to-mid January, since they need a long head start. Some brassicas (broccoli, cabbage) can also begin indoors late in the month for a March/April transplant.
- Seed catalog planning and ordering — January is prime time to plan out the year's garden, order seed before popular varieties sell out, and map bed rotations.
- Pruning — dormant fruit trees, grapes, and berry bushes can be pruned this month while they're fully dormant.
- Soil and bed prep — if weather allows, adding compost or amendments to beds ahead of spring.
- Tool maintenance — cleaning, sharpening, and repairing garden tools before the season ramps up.

Practical notes:

- This is the "planning and prep" bookend to the growing year — a good month garden planning, seed starting, or soil health planning, since there's little urgency around outdoor planting.