

In The Dirt: May NC

May in the NC Piedmont/Foothills is one of the best all-around planting months — last frost has passed (typically mid-April for your area), soil is warming nicely, and both warm-season and some late cool-season crops work.

Direct-seed all month — warm-season crops (this is their prime window):

- Bush and pole snap beans
- Lima beans
- Summer squash and zucchini
- Winter squash and pumpkins
- Cucumbers
- Sweet corn (great time to start successions)
- Okra (loves the warming soil)
- Southern peas/cowpeas (can start toward late May)
- Melons (cantaloupe, watermelon)

Direct-seed early May — tail end of cool-season window:

- Carrots (last good round before it gets too hot)
- Beets
- Radishes (fast enough to sneak in before heat)
- Swiss chard (more heat-tolerant than lettuce/spinach, can go later in the month)

Getting risky by mid-to-late May:

- Lettuce and spinach — early May direct-seeding can still work, especially with some afternoon shade, but they'll bolt fast once heat arrives. Better to have these already growing from earlier spring plantings.

Also good this month:

- Basil and warm-weather herbs
- Sunflowers, zinnias, cosmos, and other heat-loving cut flowers
- Setting out sweet potato slips (not seed, but a May staple)

Practical notes:

- May is generally forgiving — rainfall is usually decent and temps aren't yet brutal, so germination is easier than June/July.
- Succession planting beans, squash, and cucumbers every couple weeks starting now sets you up for a long harvest window.
- Mulch as plants get going to help retain moisture heading into summer heat.