

Planning Your Planting

Getting Your Garden Ready For Spring

What is a Planting Plan?

A planting plan is a plan that you create for your garden to help you organize your garden space and your seeding & planting schedule.

A planting plan will help you design your garden to fit your own particular wants and needs, based on the resources that you have available, the amount of time you want to spend maintaining your garden, and what your goals for your garden are.

We'll walk through the basic steps of creating a planting plan so that you can get your garden off to a good start for a successful growing season.

Step 1: Think About Resources

Make a list of the resources that you have available for your garden. Think about physical resources, like space for a garden, a compost pile, tools, and access to water. What other resources do you need, and what do you already have?

Then, think about other types of resources that will go into your garden, like labor. How much time do you want to spend gardening? Do you have friends and family members who will help you in the garden?

If you don't have much time to garden, or if you have physical limitations that may make it harder to kneel on the ground, you may want to consider alternative gardening methods like straw bale, container, or pallet gardening, all of which reduce the amount of weeds that grow.

If there are resources you still need for your garden, think about the different ways you might access them. Can you borrow garden tools from a friend or neighbor? Do you know a rancher who has aged manure? If there are items you think you'll have to buy, decide on a budget and a spending plan for your garden.

Step 2: Find a Place for Your Garden

Before you decide where to put your garden, think about the space that you have and the type of crops you want to grow. Most plants need at least some amount of direct sunlight a day, but will have different preferences as to how much.

If you're going to turn an area in your yard into a permanent garden plot, find a spot that is close to a water source and receives a good amount of sunlight.

If you rent your home and are not allowed to till or work the soil, you can try pallet, straw bale, or container gardening.

If you don't have access to outdoor growing space, try indoor container gardening! Plants will still need to be placed near a (south or west facing) window to get direct sunlight, but it's possible to grow food indoors. Herbs are great to grow fresh in your kitchen. If you're feeling adventurous, try planting tomatoes in five gallon buckets.

Step 3: Finding the Right Plants For Your Garden

There are three main types of garden crops: annuals, biennials, and perennials.

Annuals are crops that go from seed to seed in a single year. Biennials can usually be harvested in their first year, but take two years to complete their life cycle (go from seed to seed). Perennials live for more than two years, and many can live for over a decade. Asparagus, rhubarb, and berry bushes are all perennial plants.

Perennials live a long time, but they usually take longer to grow from seed and may not produce food for the first few years. If this is your first time gardening, try starting your garden with annuals and biennials while you think about what perennials you'll want to add to your permanent garden space.

Once you've decided what to grow, do some research to see when the best time to plant each crop is. Most crops prefer to be planted in the spring, but there are some (like garlic) that prefer to be planted in the fall to be harvested the following summer.

Step 4: Design Your Garden

You're ready to design your garden space! Here are few things you may want to think about:

Size of your garden beds: You don't want to walk on your garden beds once you've prepared the soil (this compacts the soil and makes it harder for plants to grow), so make sure that your garden beds are small enough that you can comfortably reach the middle to weed and harvest.

Review the recommendations on the back of your seed packets. What plants need a full day of sun, and which plants are okay with partial shade? Think about placing taller plants on the northern side of your garden so they don't shade shorter plants.

Maintaining healthy soils: if you garden in the same spot every year, you'll want to rotate your crops so they're in a different spot than they were last year (this does not apply to perennials). Different plants take up and return different amounts of nutrients to the soil, so rotating your crops will help prevent depleting your soil of nutrients.

Companion planting: Some plants get along well and help each other grow; these plants can be planted together in the same garden bed as companions. Other plants will not grow well if planted together and should be planted in different beds. Visit www.sicangucdc.org/food-resources to review our Companion Planting Guide.

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Seed Saving: Are you planning to save seeds this year? If so, check recommended isolation distances (how far different varieties of the same type of plant need to be planted from each other so they don't cross breed) as well as recommended population size, or the number of plants you'll need of a certain type in order to have viable seeds.

Talk to your neighbors to see what they're growing, and see if you can coordinate and share your seeds or harvest. To save seeds from corn, you'll want 100 to 200 plants - that's a lot of corn to grow on your own! Maybe you and some neighbors can each grow 50 plants.

You'll also want to make sure that your plants don't crossbreed: if you and your next door neighbor each plant different varieties of winter squash, your plants are technically the same species and will cross-pollinate, meaning that the seeds they produce may not grow into the same type of squash that you planted.

If you can't physically distance your plants, you can prevent cross breeding by using isolation cages to cover the garden bed, or blossom bags to cover the blossoms of the plant when it's flowering.

Step 5: Create Your Planting Plan

It's time to make your planting plan!

First, check the frost date for your area. You'll want to find the date where there is only a 10% chance of another frost. For Rosebud (zone 4), this is around May 27th.

Then, check your seed packets to see when seeds should be transplanted outside. Cool weather crops like cabbage and broccoli can usually be transplanted a week or so before the last frost. For warm weather crops, like tomatoes and peppers, it's best to wait about five days after the last frost date just to be safe.

Seed packets will usually tell you how far in advance you should start seeds indoors before transplanting. Some crops take a shorter amount of time to reach maturity (when they're ready to be harvested) and only needed to be started indoors two to four weeks before transplanting. Other crops take a longer time, and you'll want to start them inside ten to twelve weeks before transplanting outdoors.

You'll want to take into account the frost date, recommended transplant date, and days to maturity when deciding when to start your seeds.

Some plants are best to direct sow outdoors. You'll want to avoid transplanting crops like root veggies, and other plants with sensitive root systems like squash, cucumbers, and melons. You might also want to direct sow plants like lettuce and radishes which take a shorter amount of time to mature. You can succession plant these crops throughout your season, meaning direct sow them in your garden every few weeks to get a continual harvest.

Step 6: Caring for Your Seeds & Transplanting

Now that you've made your planting plan, you're ready to start seeding! You'll want to seed in small trays - if you don't have seeding trays, egg cartons work well!

Water your plants every day, and set them near a west or south facing window to get plenty of light. If your plants get 'leggy' (grow very long stems), they need more light.

Before transplanting outdoors, you'll want to harden your plants off for a week or two, which you can do by leaving your plants outside to expose them to the wind and sun. Start off with just one hour a day, and slowly increase the amount of time until your plants are spending all day outdoors. If you don't harden your plants off before transplanting, the sudden change of conditions from indoors to outside can shock your plants.

For more information, visit www.sicangucdc.org/food-resources to review our planting guides to help you map out your garden, create your planting plan, and guide you through the seed starting process.

Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1GaWFuPv8s>

<https://www.plantmaps.com/>

<https://garden.org/apps/frost-dates/>

<https://www.almanac.com/gardening/frostdates>

<https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/>

<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/online-tools-calculators.html>