



## **“From the Potting Shed”**

Riverview Garden Club - Helpful Hints

March, 2026

As we eagerly await the arrival of spring, here are some garden chores and activities to help you plan ahead.

### ***Things to do this month...***

#### **Spring Garden Maintenance**

- Take a soil sample and bring it to your local county extension office for a soil test before planting time arrives.

1. Cooperative Extension of Passaic County, Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, 1310 Route 23 North Wayne, NJ 07470, (973-305-5740)  
Rutgers Master Gardeners of Passaic County Helpline (973-305-5743)

2. Cooperative Extension of Morris County, Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, County Building 550, West Hanover Avenue, Morristown, NJ  
Rutgers Master Gardeners of Morris County Helpline (973-285-8305)

- Avoid walking in your garden when the soil is saturated. Compressing the soil with weight will result in soil compaction, leading to problems in the garden bed.
- Pull up any weeds when they appear and before they get established in the garden bed.
- Control weeds in early spring by adding a couple of inches of mulch to your garden beds.
- Once your soil test results are in, add well-decomposed compost and any other recommended amendments to help build healthier soil. These actions will bolster your soil and prevent a lot of propagating spring weeds from overtaking your garden before your gardens are in full swing.

**Pruning Trees and Shrubs After Winter**- March is an excellent time for late winter pruning!

- Prune away branches that have suffered winter damage.
- Prune grapevines and fruit trees.
- Do a hard pruning of dormant woody perennials and dormant ornamental grasses. You can be aggressive about your pruning with these dormant plants and only leave the first bud at the plant's base. This applies only to plants that produce blooms on new stems.
- Avoid pruning flowering perennial shrubs that have already set their buds for the new season (forsythia, azalea, rhododendron, hydrangea macrophylla, lilac, viburnum, weigela, etc.) otherwise, you risk cutting away their blooming potential.
- If your plantings are purely for greenery and privacy, you may trim the bushes' tips to shape them; Boxwoods are an example of these green shrubs.

### **Spring Garden Planning**

There are still many chilly and rainy days ahead so you can keep working on your garden planning.

- Attend a Flower and Garden Show for inspiration!
- Check out some new gardening magazines and books.
- Search your favorite gardening websites for ideas and tips.
- Use your sketched-out garden design plans and dream boards to figure out where your future plants and seedlings will go.
- If pests or diseases were a problem for you last season, it's a great time to research companion plants and spacing provisions to protect and boost your plants' productivity.
- Decide what you still need to fill unoccupied spaces in your garden beds before it is time to buy them.
- Use your vegetable garden planting charts to guide you on what to plant and when, so you will be ready for planting when warmer temperatures roll in.
- Construct your new raised beds, trellises, and other garden structures indoors for later placement in the garden.

### **Assess Garden Tools and Supplies** -Spring will be here before you know it!

- If you haven't done so already, be sure that you assess your tools for sharpening and cleaning needs.
- The lawnmower should receive a fluid change as well. It's best to get all of your gardening supplies in tip-top shape so that when spring rolls in, you are fully prepared for yard and garden work, so you do not have any setbacks.
- Check your tools for disrepair signs, tune-up and thoroughly clean and sanitize, sharpen blades, and oil up moving parts. It is also essential to keep your garden free from diseases that may have been a problem in your garden last season.
- Start by using steel wool or a metal grill brush to clean any debris off your garden tools. Wipe surfaces with a damp rag. Use coarse sandpaper to scuff away any signs of rust on metal surfaces. Dab vegetable oil onto a rag and wipe metal surfaces. Use a piece of sandpaper to slough away any rough or splintering spots on wooden handles. Wipe wooden handles down with a rag wet with linseed oil.

### **Force Branches Indoors**

Consider pruning a few branches from some flowering shrubs and trees to bring a breadth of spring into your home!

Make a clean cut and arrange the branches in a vase of clean water to force an early bloom. The following make great branch sources: Forsythia, Dogwood, Flowering Cherry or Pear Trees, Magnolia, Pussy willow, Flowering Fruit Trees

### **Seed Starting and Vegetable Plant Calculating**

If you prefer to start your flowers and vegetables from seed and are eager to get growing, here are some charts to help you organize a seed starting schedule. There is also information on how to calculate the number of vegetable plants needed to feed your family and have a good harvest!

## Seed Starting and Transplanting Schedule

### Seedlings that can be transplanted outside in early spring

These plants can be transplanted outdoors in spring when it's 40 to 50 degrees F during the day.

Plant name <i>Botanical name</i>	Seed germination temperatures	Days to germination	Weeks to planting seedlings outdoors	Comments
<b>Broccoli</b> <i>Brassica oleracea italica</i>	70 to 75°F	7 to 10	5 to 7	Set outside up to 2 weeks before last frost
<b>Cabbage</b> <i>Brassica oleracea capitata</i>	70 to 75°F	5 to 10	5 to 7	Can take a light frost
<b>Cauliflower</b> <i>Brassica oleracea botrytis</i>	75 to 80°F	5 to 10	5 to 7	Prefers cool temps or won't produce head
<b>Pansy</b> <i>Viola x wittrockiana</i>	65 to 75°F	7 to 15	8 to 12	Benefits from stratification; can take frost; foliage freezes at 10°F
<b>Sweet Pea</b> <i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>	55 to 65°F	14 to 21	4 to 6	Benefits from scarification; can also be direct-sown outdoors; can take a light frost

## Seedlings that can be transplanted outdoors after average last frost date

When temperatures are starting to warm up and the last average frost date for your area has gone by, you can transplant these young plants out in the garden.

Plant name <i>Botanical name</i>	Germination temperatures	Days to germination	Weeks to planting outdoors	Comments
<b>Artichoke</b> <i>Cynara scolymus</i>	70 to 80°F	18 to 21	6 to 8	Benefits from stratification; takes 5 to 7 months from sowing to crop
<b>Bells of Ireland</b> <i>Moluccella laevis</i>	65 to 68°F	12 to 21	6 to 8	Needs light to germinate; benefits from stratification; doesn't like roots disturbed – use peat pots
<b>Butterfly weed</b> <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	70 to 75°F	21 to 28	6 to 8	Doesn't like roots disturbed – use peat pots
<b>Celery</b> <i>Apium graveolens</i>	70 to 75°F	20 to 25	10 to 12	Seedlings need constant moisture to develop
<b>Foxglove</b> <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	65 to 70°F	15 to 20	10 to 12	Needs light to germinate; biennial so may not bloom first year
<b>Hyacinth bean</b> <i>Lablab purpureus</i>	65 to 70°F	5 to 12	6 to 8	Benefits from stratification; can take up to 80 days to get beans
<b>Sage</b> <i>Salvia officinalis</i>	60 to 70°F	7 to 21	6 to 8	Needs light to germinate; let dry out between watering to avoid rot
<b>Statice</b> <i>Limonium sinuatum</i>	68 to 75°F	12 to 20	8 to 10	Needs light to germinate; plant seedlings outdoors 12 in. apart
<b>Sweet alyssum</b> <i>Lobularia maritima</i>	65 to 70°F	8 to 10	4 to 5	Plant seedlings outdoors 6 to 8 in. apart

## Seedlings you should wait to transplant outside until the danger of frost has passed

These warm-weather lovers are the last seedlings to be transplanted outdoors. They do best after all danger of frost has gone by and the soil has warmed — usually when daytime temperatures are around 70 degrees F and the nights are in the 50s, it's safe to transplant this group.

Plant name <i>Botanical name</i>	Germination temperatures	Days to germination	Weeks to planting outdoors	Comments
<b>Celosia</b> <i>Celosia</i> spp. And hybrids	70 to 80°F	8 to 14	4 to 6	Pinch tip when 8 to 12 in. tall for branching
<b>Coleus</b> <i>Plectranthus</i> spp. And hybrids	70 to 75°F	10 to 14	6 to 8	Needs light to germinate; pinch tip when plants have four to six sets of leaves
<b>Cucumber</b> <i>Cucumis sativus</i>	68 to 72°F	7 to 10	4 to 6	Don't disturb roots when transplanting
<b>Cup &amp; saucer vine</b> <i>Cobaea scandens</i>	70 to 75°F	10 to 30	6 to 8	Benefits from scarification; vigorous grower, plant near a strong trellis
<b>Eggplant</b> <i>Solanum melongena</i>	80 to 90°F	10 to 14	8 to 10	Don't set out too early, cool temps stunt growth
<b>Floss flower</b> <i>Ageratum houstonianum</i>	78 to 82°F	5 to 10	6 to 8	Needs light to germinate; plant seedlings outdoors 9 to 12 in. apart
<b>Joseph's coat</b> <i>Amaranthus tricolor</i>	70 to 75°F	10 to 15	3 to 4	Let dry out between watering to avoid rot
<b>Nasturtium</b> <i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	60 to 65°F	7 to 14	4 to 6	Benefits from scarification; can also be direct-sown outdoors; no need to fertilize after planting outside
<b>Pepper</b> <i>Capsicum annuum</i>	80 to 90°F	7 to 10	6 to 8	Don't set out too early; cool temps stunt growth
<b>Tomato</b> <i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>	80 to 90°F	7 to 14	5 to 6	Plant leggy seedlings deep and they'll form roots all along the stem for added support

## Calculating How Many Vegetables to Plant

### How many vegetable plants for a family

In general, multiply the number of plants per person by 3 or 4 for a family-sized planting. We've done the work for you in adjusting the numbers of these plants in the chart so at harvest you aren't overwhelmed with too many delicious veggies. Keeping a garden journal from year to year will help you track which crops you had more or less than needed so you can better plan for future growing seasons.

Vegetable crop	Plants per 1 person	Plants per 4 People	Plant spacing	Direct Sow Seeds	Transplant Seedlings	Comments
Asparagus	5 to 10	25 plants	12 to 18 in.	X	X	It takes 2 to 3 years before harvest but can last up to a decade
Beans	10 to 15	40 to 45	Thin seedlings to 2 to 3 in.	X		Plant successive crops every two weeks for a continuous harvest; great for canning and pickling
Beets	10 to 12	40 to 48	Thin seedlings to 3 in.	X		Beets store well; plant in spring and fall for two harvests each year
Broccoli	1 to 2	4 to 6	15 in.		X	Every time you cut a head, more smaller ones will form
Cabbage	2 to 3	8 to 10	Thin seedlings to 9 to 12 in.	X	X	Plant cabbage closer together for smaller heads
Carrots	20 to 30	80 to 90	Thin seedlings to 1 to 2 in.	X		Long shelf life; plant in spring and fall for multiple harvests
Celery	1 to 2	4 to 6	8 to 12 in.		X	Stronger taste than store-bought; celery stalks will regrow after being cut
Corn	10 to 12	40 to 48	12 in.	X		Plant in blocks for best pollination
Cucumbers	1 to 2	3 to 4	Thin seedlings to 12 to 24 in.	X	X	Plant 12 in. apart if using a trellis system and 24 in. apart if they're rambling on the ground
Eggplant	2 to 3	4 to 6	38 in.		X	Each plant will produce about 8 to 20 well-developed fruits, depending on variety
Kale	4 to 5	16 to 20	12 in.	X		Sow seeds 3 in. apart and thin to 12 in. The seedlings can be enjoyed as microgreens!

Vegetable crop	Plants per 1 person	Plants per 4 People	Plant spacing	Direct Sow Seeds	Transplant Seedlings	Comments
Lettuce	4 to 6	16 to 24	Thin seedlings to 9 in.	X	X	Stagger sowing for one head per week per person
Melons	1 to 2	2 to 4	24 in.	X		Plant two seeds per hole in mounds 24 inches apart
Onions	6 to 12	24 to 48	4 to 6 in.		X	Buy sets (individual bulbs) or plants (in bundles) and plant two per person, per week
Peas	15 to 20	60 to 80	Thin seedlings to 2 in.	X	X	Grow peas on a trellis
Peppers	1 to 3	1 to 12	12 to 24 in.		X	Most hot peppers are prolific: one plant is enough for one or four people; for larger peppers, grow two to three plants per person
Potatoes	4 to 6	12 to 24	12 in.	X		Seed potatoes are tubers you plant in the ground; each plant will yield 1 lb. of potatoes
Radishes	10 to 15	60	4 to 6 in.	X		Enjoy radish seedlings as microgreens; tasty on salads and sandwiches
Spinach	4 to 8	16 to 32	Thin seedlings to 3 to 6 in.	X	X	Plant in spring and fall for two harvests a year
Squash (Summer & Winter)	1 to 2	2 to 4	Thin seedlings to 18 to 36 in.	X	X	Plant summer squash 18 in. apart and larger plants of winter squash 36 in. apart
Tomatoes	1 to 4	1 to 16	12 to 24 in.		X	Cherries: Grow one per person; slicing: grow one to two per person; paste: grow three to four per person
Zucchini	1 to 2	4	36 in.	X		Flowers from zucchini plants are also edible, fry them up and give them a try for something new

Source:

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*Happy Spring and Happy Gardening!*