

Starting Seeds For Transplant Into Your Fall Garden

In Zone 9 we have the pleasure of growing vegetable gardens all year round. This can cause a lot of confusion for new gardeners or gardeners from further north. The fact that pretty much all the gardening books explain gardening from a further north view and don't mention our southern zone view, makes the confusion that much worse.

You have to think in reverse, and it requires a little math.

- Instead of the last frost of winter, think first frost of winter.
- Instead of planting after danger of the last frost, think harvesting before danger of the first frost.
- Instead of worrying about heat and shade, think cold and wrapping.

You can plant seeds of all your plants directly in the ground at the appropriate time, BUT, you run some risks if you do, especially with the warm weather plants.

- Seeds don't germinate and you have to plant again, maybe several times
- Seedlings get destroyed or die
- You may only have a few seeds of a certain variety, or not commonly available locally, or rare seeds, or very expensive seeds that need to be nurtured
- Planting bed isn't ready yet

- Run out of time for plants or fruit to mature before temperatures and day length turn too cold and too short

If you start your seeds in pots or flats before their fall planting dates you get a BIG head start on the season and vastly increase your chances of a good harvest.

Below is a chart for the average expected first (winter) and last (spring) frosts in Florida.

The second chart lists fall garden plants, how many weeks before garden planting time you should start the seeds in little pots/flats, how many weeks (the minimum) before the first frost they should be planted in the garden, and when they should be planted in the garden. Get a calendar, find what the approximate first frost date is in your area, do some math, and design a planting date schedule for your garden.

Average First and Last Frost Dates for Florida

City	Spring	Fall
Avon Park	3/1	12/6
Everglades	1/25	12/28
Fort Lauderdale	2/1	1/16
Fort Pierce	2/19	12/15
Gainesville	3/29	11/5
Jacksonville	3/14	11/16
Miami	--	--
Orlando (Sanford)	3/4	12/3
Pensacola	3/20	11/8
St. Petersburg	1/23	1/2
Tallahassee	4/5	10/28
Tampa	2/25	12/3

Source: "Climatology of the U.S. No. 20, Supplement No. 1", 1988, National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Vegetable	Weeks To Start Seeds Before Transplant	Weeks Before 1 st Expected Frost Date	When To Plant
Broccoli	4-6	15	Aug/Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Cabbage	4-6	15	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Collards	4-6	15	Aug/Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Kale	4-6	15	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Leeks	4-6	15	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Onion (seed)	4-6	20	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Spinach	4-6	8	Oct/Nov
Cauliflower	2-4	15	Oct/Nov/Dec
Celery	2-4	N/A	Aug/Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Lettuce	2-6	13	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Swiss Chard	2-4	15	Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec
Tomatoes	6-10	15	Sept
Cucumber	2-3	16	Sept
Eggplant	8-10	15	Aug/Sept
Melons	2-4	16	Aug
Peppers	6-8	16	Aug/Sept
Pumpkins	3	16	Aug
Squash, Summer	4	16	Aug/Sept
Squash, Winter	4	16	Aug