

STEP-BY-STEP METHOD FOR GROWING ORGANIC VEGETABLES
BY PAT WELSH AUTHOR OF PAT WELSH'S SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
GARDENING, MONTH BY MONTH.

NOTE: If you are growing vegetables year-round there will be some carryover of cool-season crops into warm weather, for example artichokes, which can be put in from transplants in March and harvested in June, or globe onions, which are planted from seeds in November and harvested in late May or June, and strawberries which are also planted in November and harvested throughout spring into early summer.

EASY-CARE WARM-SEASON CROPS

BEAN, LIMA

Planting months: April, May, June. Spacing: sow seed, thin to 11/2 inches apart. Special Tips: grow best inland, but not in desert (high temperatures sabotage bean set.) Bush limas give quicker harvest than pole beans. Pole beans can be grown up corn stalks. Pre-sprout seeds to speed harvest. Don't overwater. When limas are thirsty, leaves turn dark green and start to turn up (from horizontal to vertical.) Feed lightly 3 weeks after seeds are up and during peak of growth. Picking when leaves are wet can spread rust. Harvest: when pods swell, yet remain green with 3 or 4 beans in the pod, 65-75 days for bush beans, up to 78-95 for pole beans, depending on variety. Recommended Varieties: Fordhook, Fordhook Baby, King of the garden, and Burpee's Best.

BEANS, SNAP

Planting Months: March through July, but early planting beats pests. Spacing: In rows thin to 11/2 inches apart, pole beans plant 6 thin to 3. Special Tips: Pre-sprout seeds (if to be planted) in heavy clay soil, especially if cold and wet. Or dig furrow, water twice, plant seeds scar side down, cover with potting soil, don't water again until sprouts appear, then water deeply. Cover seeds with inverted berry basket to discourage birds. Harvest: 50-60 days, before pods bulge with seeds. Pick daily so plants keep bearing. Recommended Varieties: Kentucky Wonder (brown seeded, not white seeded – don't buy Kentucky Blue), Blue Lake Pole Bean, Venture Early Bush Bean (easy and tastes as good as Blue Lake), Pencil Pod (an early bush wax bean), Dorabel Yellow Wax Pole Bean, Royal Burgundy Bush Bean, or try Violet Podded Stringless (a purple pole bean from Territorial Seeds), Jumbo (excellent cross between Romano/Kentucky Wonder.)

BEET

Planting Months: Year-round. Spacing: Sow seeds one inch apart. Rows spaced one to two feet. Thin to four inches. Special Tips: Use hoe handle to make straight rows. Cover seeds with one inch fine compost potting mix and pat down. Harvesting: 55-60 days. Best eaten between tiny and golf ball size. Recommended Varieties: Sangria, Bulls Blood, Chioggia (has red and white rings).

CARROT

Planting Months: Year-round Crop. Spacing: Sow seeds then thin to 1 to 2 inches apart, rows 14 inches apart. Special Tips: (P. 363 in my book.) Fine soil is best. Amend soil

well. No Manure! Too much nitrogen can cause forking. In heavier soil grow short varieties. Grow in deep soil. Trick for growing straight carrots is to wait until ground is dry four inches down or until sprouts just begin to wilt then commence regular deep watering. Trick for germination: Pour boiling water down row just after seeds are sowed. Or, pre-sprout: paper plate, peat moss?, freezer?, overnight bottom heat, sprout and plant, cover lightly and keep damp. Seeds sprout 2 weeks early. Prevent green shoulders by mulching row. Harvesting: 65-70 days. Recommended (short) Varieties: Nantes, Chantenay or miniature varieties.

CORN

Planting Months: March through July. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin plants to 8-12 inches apart, rows three feet apart. Special Tips: Grow in block rather than long skinny row, plant north of other veggies, Protect seeds with inverted berry baskets. Pre-sprout shriveled type seeds. Isolate super-sweet varieties to prevent cross-pollination (see p. 169? of my book for explanation of individually/open pollinated, **SU** or standard varieties, SH2 or Supersweet Hybrids, and SE or Sugary Enhanced Hybrids.) Don't take off the suckers (side shoots)! Water and feed extra when silks appear. In small gardens, hand pollinate for best crop. Harvesting: 70-90 days. When tips of silks go crispy brown and ears fill out, pierce kernel with thumbnail, clear juice means not ready, milky means just right, dry and pasty means over-ripe. Recommended Varieties: How Sweet It Is, and Early X-tra Sweet (Sh2 Supersweet bicolor). Sugary Enhanced: Miracle, Sugar Snow (white), and Honey and Cream. For dry soils and strong disease resistance try Tuxedo or the bi-color Lancelot.

CUCUMBER

Planting Months: April, May, June. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to 12 inches apart in rows 5 feet apart, or grow in mounds 6 feet apart. Special Tips: Large-gauge hardware cloth held up by metal fence posts makes good support. Weave plants onto support. Don't let cukes go dry or they'll be bitter. Harvesting: 50-60 days. Pick often. Recommended Varieties: Burpee Burpless, Burpee Hybrid, Lemon Cukes (all varieties), Beit Alpha Sweet Alpee, Suyo Long Burpless, Salad Bush Hybrid.

EGGPLANT

Planting Months: April, May, June. Spacing: 18-24 inches, rows 2-2 1/2 feet apart. Special Tips: Need heat. Cut fruit, don't pull them off stem, stake plants with green bamboo to hold them up, especially Oriental varieties. Harvesting: Fruit should be glossy, filled out, and **big enough to eat?** Flesh should spring back when pressed with thumb. If seeds are brown, it's overripe. Pick often. Recommended Varieties: Asian Hybrid Ichiban, Black Beauty, Burpee Hybrid, Rosa Bianca (my favorite), Dusky, Cloud Nine.

LEAF LETTUCE

Planting Months: All except July and August. Spacing: Sow seeds and thin to 6 inches apart. Special Tips: Control slugs and snails from planting time forward. Keep crop well fed and watered. Harvesting: 60-70 days for full size but can harvest outside leaves and let center keep growing. Recommended Varieties: Romaine, Rouge d'Hiver (heat resistant French variety), Mervielle do Quatre Saisons.

MELON (Cantaloupe)

Planting Months: May, June, July. Spacing: 12 inches apart, rows 6 feet apart, or in tires or mounds 4-6 feet apart. Special Tips: Grow over black plastic to preserve heat, plant in tire for early harvest and more heat along coast. Stop watering a week or two before harvest (after fruit is full grown but not yet ripe) or fruit will be watery and flavorless. Harvesting: Look for good color and crack around the stem. Cantaloupe will fall off stem easily with a slight twist when it's ripe (called full slip). For other types of melon count days to harvest, watch for color changes, and check for aroma according to package directions for each. (Late melons do not slip off the stem.) Recommended Varieties: Burpee Hybrid, Earligold, Sweet'n'Early, Charentais (French variety), Gallica (delicious, very sweet, green-fleshed from Israel), "Crenshaw" (late melon for long, hot inland summer only - protect from sunburn with a shingle.)

NEW ZEALAND SPINACH

Planting Months: March-July. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to 12 inches apart, rows 2 feet apart. Special Tips: Soak seeds overnight to encourage sprouting. Harvesting: Cut top sprouts 4-5 inches long, plants re-grow, are invasive inland. Steam, stir-fry, or eat raw. May continue to grow year-round. Recommended Varieties: Just one kind.

PEPPER

Planting Months: April, May, June. Spacing: Twelve inches apart. Special Tips: Spray with 1 Tablespoon of Epsom Salts when flowers appear. Harvesting: Pick when green or allow to go red/yellow/gold/orange... Recommended varieties: Anaheim, California Wonder, Chocolate Beauty, Golden Bell, Purple Beauty, Ancho, Early Jalapeno, Fajita Bell.

PUMPKIN

Planting Months: April, May, June. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to 12 inches apart, rows six feet apart or grow 2 plants in hills 6 feet apart. Special Tips: For giant pumpkins save two strong branches, allow only one fruit for each branch. Cover branch with soil every four inches for rooting. Slip a shingle under fruit to prevent rotting. Harvesting: Plant June 1-15 for Halloween harvest. Recommended Varieties: Big Moon, Jack be Little, Orange Smoothie, Musquee de Provence.

SQUASH, SUMMER

Planting Months: April-August. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to 18 inches apart. Special Tips: Grow mildew-resistant varieties along coast. Harvesting: Pick frequently to prevent overgrown fruit. Male flowers may also be used for cooking. Recommended varieties: Sunburst Hybrid, SpaceSaver, Kuta, Sunglo, Spineless Beauty.

SQUASH, WINTER

Planting Months: April, May, June. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to 12 inches apart, rows 6 feet apart or hills 8 feet apart, 3 plants to each. Bush varieties may be closer. Special Tips: Winter squash got this name not because it's grown in winter but because it grows a tough coat that enables it to be kept and eaten throughout winter. Plant winter squash in

April or may and harvest in fall. Harvesting: 100 days. Recommended Varieties: Sweet Mama, Dumpling, Cornell's Bush Delicata, Table Ace.

SWISS CHARD

Planting Months: Year-round. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to six inches, rows 18 inches apart. Special Tips: Soak seeds 24 hours before planting. Easy to grow, huge roots, fertilize sparingly (compost is best, or aged manure). Harvesting: Begin harvesting outer leaves as soon as they mature, leaving plant to grow. Recommended Varieties: Bright Lights, Rhubarb (red chard), Fordhook Giant (mild flavor).

TOMATO

Planting Months: March-July. Spacing: Twelve inches apart, rows six feet apart. Special Tips: Don't prune along the coast if disease has been a problem in past years. Prune inland for bigger fruit. Plant deeply. Use fertilizer specially formulated for tomatoes. Water deeply and infrequently to avoid blossom end rot. Harvesting: 140 days **or depending on variety**. Recommended Varieties: Early Girl Improved, Ace Hybrid Improved (inland, not coastal), Better Boy, Celebrity, Sweet 100, Golden Gem (new yellow cherry tomato), Aussie, BeefMaster, Green Zebra, Patio (grow in containers only.) Tomato Growers Supply Co.: 888/478-73333. Heirlooms are easiest grown in raised beds or large tubs.

TURNIP

Planting Months: Year-round. Spacing: Sow seeds, thin to seven inches apart, rows fourteen inches apart. Special Tips: Rich Humus-filled soil, rapid growth, no fresh manure. Need plenty of light. Harvesting: 50-70 days. Pick when small, plant successive crops. Recommended Varieties: Tokyo Cross, Purple Top White Globe, Shogo.

TIPS AND HINTS FOR GROWING EASY-CARE WARM-SEASON CROPS

1. Choose a site in full sun.
2. Build raised boxes or plant in ground.
3. For raised beds: Nail 1/8"-1/4" hardware cloth on bottom of each box to keep out gophers.
4. Fill boxes with good quality topsoil.
5. Cover the ground surrounding the raised boxes with landscape cloth or newspapers 10 sheets thick, and then cover paper or cloth with a 3"-4" layer of mulch or pea gravel to prevent clean footing and keep out weeds (gravel is best).
6. Control invasive roots of old trees with stepping stones and thick Visquine under tall boxes.
7. Use hand pulling or a hoe to rid existing boxes of weeds, if these have grown prior to planting.
8. Eradicate or control ground squirrels, gophers, rats, and other pests (if using poison, wear gloves to handle and use tamper-proof containers. Some licensed pest control companies specialize in animal pest control.)

9. Other methods for getting rid of animal pests include manual and battery-operated traps, sound mechanisms, physical barriers, and domestic cats.
10. A new solution to animal pest problems: Nixalite of America, Inc. Garden Protector electric fence. Battery operated, easy to install.
11. Measure square-foot area of boxes, purchase adequate organic soil amendment to create a 4" thick layer on top of garden soil.
12. Spread soil amendment on to beds and use a spade to dig (or till) the organic amendment into the top 6" of garden soil.
13. In the same manner sprinkle organic fertilizer recommended for vegetables (chicken manure, commercial brand, or make your own) onto the beds and use a spade or pronged tiller to incorporate the fertilizer into the top 6" of garden soil.
14. Arrange for water system (drip or hose.)
15. Depending on the time of year, purchase seeds and/or plants of cool-season or warm-season crops and edible flowers. Choose the appropriate vegetables and flowers to grow in each season. Learn about the influence of day-length and temperature.
16. Build structures to support climbing plants.
17. Decide which vegetables are to be grown in each bed. Draw a plot plan in order to rotate crops in future years.
18. Plant seeds and transplants in rows, with tall crops to the north and shorter crops to the south. Learn about germination; different seeds require different planting depth and temperature to sprout. All need moisture; some need light in order to germinate.
19. Water plants. Seeds must be watered daily until germinated; transplants daily at first, then 3 times a week until established; later weekly or more often depending on the specific plant the weather.
20. Harvest crops when young and tender, according to the rules of harvesting that apply to each vegetable.
21. Control pests using organic methods, such as using BT for caterpillars, handpicking pests, crop rotation. Water deeply and well. Plant resistant varieties. Keep a clean garden.
22. When not growing vegetables, plant cover crops.
23. Choose a site for the compost pile.
24. NOTE: if you are growing vegetables year-round there will be some carry over of cool-season crops into warm weather; for example artichokes, which can be put in from transplants in March and harvested in June, or globe onions, which are planted from seeds in November and harvested in late May or June, and strawberries which are also planted in November and harvested throughout spring and into early summer.