



When to Plant in Illinois

Knowing when to plant for your area helps gardeners maximize the growing season. Planting dates are determined by the first and last frost dates as well as how long it takes for a crop to mature. There is also a difference for cool- and warm-season crops.

- **Cool-season crops** grow and develop best in early spring or fall temperatures. Some cool-season crops can withstand frost without damage, and some are even improved by experiencing a light frost. Examples: [Carrots](#), [broccoli](#), [turnip](#), and [radish](#).
- **Warm-season crops** do not grow well in lower temperatures and must be planted well after the average last frost date. Examples: [Tomato](#), [peppers](#), [winter squash](#), and [cucumber](#).

Illinois Frost-Free Dates

Spring frost-free dates vary year to year. The Illinois State Climatologist has spring and fall frost maps based on temperature data from 1991 to 2020. Fall frost dates are also available for gardeners who grow cool-season vegetables. The maps are available on the [Illinois State Climatologist website](#) and can help gardeners determine when to plant.

Regional Spring Last Frost Dates

The following spring frost-free dates are a general guide. These are the median dates for when the last 32-degree freeze occurred. Last freezes have occurred both before and after these time periods.

- Northern Illinois: April 8-29
- Central Illinois: April 8-15
- Southern Illinois: April 1-8

Plant Hardiness Zones

The U.S. Department of Agriculture [Hardiness Zone map](#) helps growers better understand which perennial plants will survive a region's winter and thrive long-term. Most fruit and vegetable plants in Illinois, with a few exceptions, are annuals so the zones mostly apply to landscape plants.

Illinois has three hardiness zones and six subzones: 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, and 7b. Due to the urban heat effect, the Chicago area has a warmer zone than the rest of northern Illinois.

Crop Maturity

When to plant also depends on how long it takes a crop to mature. Always review plant tags and seed packets for how long it takes to harvest produce from the plant.

Northern Illinois has a shorter growing season than southern Illinois. The average length of the growing season varies from 215 days in far southern Illinois to 180 days in far northern Illinois. Review the [Growing Season Length map](#) on the State Climatologist website.

Fruit & Vegetable Planting Dates

Tables on the following pages provide suggested date ranges to plant vegetable seeds or transplants outside in Northern, Central and Southern Illinois. Always confirm plant dates with the seed packet or plant tag. When two dates are listed, the crop can be planted and harvested twice, for both a summer and fall crop.

Contact Us

If you have questions, reach out to your nearest Illinois Extension office for a free gardening consultation. Find your local office at go.illinois.edu/FindExtension.

Need a Hand?

Find more tips on home vegetable gardening online on at extension.illinois.edu/gardening. Explore more gardening topics on any of these Illinois Extension websites.

- [Growing Herbs](#)
- [Fruit Trees for Home Gardens](#)
- [Small Fruits for Home Gardens](#)
- [Youth Gardening](#)
- [Growing Specialty Mushrooms](#)
- [Growing Pumpkins](#)
- [Composting](#)
- [University of Illinois Plant Clinic](#)

Central Illinois Planting Guide

Planting date ranges below are recommendations for Central Illinois based on average first and last frost dates for the region. Always confirm plant dates with plant tags and seed packets.

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Asparagus	Crowns	March 15 to April 15	12" to 18"	6"	Spread roots and cover crown bud with 2 inches of soil; do not harvest first year; mow foliage after fall frost.
Bean (bush)	Seed	May 10 to June 15, July 15 to 30	2" to 4"	1"	
Bean (pole)	Seed	May 10 to June 15	4" to 6"	1"	
Beets	Seed	April 10 to July 15 (fall crop)	1"	½"	Soak in water 24 hours before planting; thin seedlings to 2 inches apart.
Broccoli	Transplant	April 10 to May 1, July 1 to 15	12" to 24"	¼ " to ½"	
Cabbage	Transplant	April 10 to July 15 (fall crop)	12" to 24"		
Carrots	Seed	April 10 to July 15 (fall crop)	½"	½"	Mix with sand or soil to spread seed more evenly; keep moist during germination; thin to 1 inch.
Cauliflower	Transplant	July 10 to 20 (fall crop)	18" to 24"		
Chard	Seed or Transplant	April 10 to June 1, July 21 to Aug. 1	2" to 4"	1"	Thin to 6 inches if seeded.
Corn	Seed	May 1 to July 9	12"	1"	
Cucumber	Seed	May 10 to June 15	12"	1"	
Eggplant	Transplant	May 10 to June 15	18" to 24"		
Endive	Seed	April 1 to May 1, July 21 to Aug. 15	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 9 inches.
Garlic	Clove	October	2" to 4"	1" to 2"	
Kale	Transplant	April 1 to 30, July 21 to Aug. 1	6"	½"	Thin to 12 inches.
Kohlrabi	Seed	March 25 to April 5, July 1	4"	½"	
Lettuce	Seed	April 1 to 30, July 1 to Aug. 31	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 4 inches; consider shade for late plantings.
Muskmelon	Seed	May 20 to June 10	24"		
Mustard	Seed	April 1 to 30, July 1 to Aug. 31	4"	½"	
Okra	Transplant	May 10 to June 15	12" to 24"		

Central Illinois Planting Guide (continued)

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Onion (green)	Sets	March 25 to May 1	2"	1"	
Onion (bulb)	Sets	March 25 to May 1	4"	1"	
Parsnip	Seed	May 1 to July 21 (Fall crop)	3"	½"	Thin to 18 to 24 inches.
Peas	Seed	April 10 to May 1	1"	1"	
Pepper	Transplant	June 1 to July 15	24"		
Potato	Whole or 2 oz piece with 2 eyes	April 1 to 15	12"	2"	
Pumpkin	Seed	May 20 to June 10	36" to 72" (between hills)	1"	5 seeds per hill; thin to 2 or 3 best seedlings.
Radish	Seed	April 5 to June 1, Aug. 1 to 30	1" to 4"	½"	
Rhubarb	Roots or Crown buds	March 25 to May 15, July 21 to Aug. 1	24"	2"	Perennial crop.
Rutabaga	Seed	May 1 to July 21 (Fall crop)	2"	½"	Thin to 6 inches when plants are 2 inches tall.
Spinach	Seed	March 25 to April 15, July 21 to Aug. 30	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ½ inch soil; thin to 2 to 4 inches.
Squash (summer)	Seed	May 10 to June 15	24" to 36"	1"	2 seeds per hole; thin weaker seedlings.
Squash (winter)	Seed	May 20 to June 1	72" (between hills)	1"	4 seeds per hill; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.
Sweet Potato	Slips	May 10 to June 1	12"		Plant in raised ridge 8 inches tall.
Tomato	Transplant	May 10 to June 1	24 "to 36"		Bury transplant up to bottom two leaves.
Turnip	Seed	May 1 to July 21 (Fall crop)	2"	½"	Thin to 4 inches when plants are 4 inches tall.
Watermelon	Seed	May 10 to June 15	48" to 72"	1"	3 to 4 seeds per hole; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.

Cook County Extension Horticulture Offices Serving

South/SW Suburbs
Nancy Kreith, Extension Educator
4747 Lincoln Mall Drive, Suite 601
Matteson, IL 60443
kreith@illinois.edu
708-679-6889

North/NW Suburbs
Amanda Anderson
2800 S River Road, Suite 240
Des Plaines IL 60018
amandaea@illinois.edu
847-201-4176

City of Chicago
Gemini Bhalsod, Extension Educator
8753 S Greenwood Ave, Suite 100
Chicago, IL 60619
gbhalsod@illinois.edu
773-233-2900