When to Plant in Illinois

Knowing when to plant for an 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 and 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

For questions, reach out to the nearest Illinois Extension office for a free gardening consultation. Find your local office at go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice.

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

Northern Illinois Planting Guide

Planting date ranges below are recommendations for northern Illinois based on average first and last frost dates for this region. Always confirm plant dates with plant tags and seed packets. Note: Due to the urban heat effect, the Chicago area has a warmer zone than the rest of Northern Illinois and may be closer to central Illinois dates. Two dates mean the crop can be planted twice for both a summer and fall harvest.

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Asparagus	Crowns	April 1 to 30	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 24 to June 30, July 30 to Aug. 14	2” to 4”	1”	
Bean (pole)	Seed	May 24 to June 30	4” to 6”	1”	
Beets	Seed	April 24 to July 30	1”	½”	Soak in water 24 hours before planting; thin seedlings to 2 inches apart.
Broccoli	Transplant	April 24 to May 15, July 15 to 30	12” to 24”	¼ “ to ½”	
Cabbage	Transplant	April 24 to July 30	12” to 24”		
Carrots	Seed	April 24 to July 30	½”	½”	Mix with sand or soil to spread seed more evenly; keep moist during germination; thin to 1 inch.
Cauliflower	Transplant	July 24 to Aug. 10	18” to 24”		
Chard	Seed or Transplant	April 24 to May 15 July 24 to Aug. 10	2” to 4”	1”	Thin to 6 inches if seeded.
Corn	Seed	May 15 to July 1	12”	1”	
Cucumber	Seed	May 24 to June 30	12”	1”	
Eggplant	Transplant	May 24 to June 30	18” to 24”		
Endive	Seed	April 14 to May 14, Aug. 5 to 30	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 9 inches.
Garlic	Clove	Mid-Sept.	2” to 4”	1” to 2”	
Kale	Transplant	April 14 to May 14, Aug. 1 to 14	6”	½”	Thin to 12 inches.
Kohlrabi	Seed	April 8 to 20, July 15	4”	½”	
Lettuce	Seed	April 15 to May 15, July 15 to Sept. 15	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 4 inches; consider shade for late plantings.
Muskmelon	Seed	June 3 to 24	24”		
Mustard	Seed	April 15 to June 15, July 15 to Sept. 15	4”	½”	
Okra	Transplant	May 24 to June 30	12” to 24”		

Northern Illinois Planting Guide (continued)

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Onion (green)	Sets	April 9 to May 15	2”	1”	
Onion (bulb)	Sets	April 9 to May15	4”	1”	
Parsnip	Seed	May 15 to Aug. 5 (fall crop)	3”	½”	Thin to 18 to 24 inches.
Peas	Seed	April 24 to May 15	1”	1”	
Pepper	Transplant	June 15 to July 30	24”		
Potato	Tuber	April 15 to 30	12”	2”	
Pumpkin	Seed	June 3 to 24	36” to 72” (between hills)	1”	5 seeds per hill; thin to 2 or 3 best seedlings.
Radish	Seed	April 20 to June 15, Aug. 15 to Sept. 15	1” to 4”	½”	
Rhubarb	Roots or Crowns	April 9 to May 30, Aug. 3 to 15	24”	2”	Perennial crop.
Rutabaga	Seed	May 15 to Aug. 5 (fall crop)	2”	½”	Thin to 6 inches when plants are 2 inches tall.
Spinach	Seed	April 5 to 30, Aug. 5 to Sept. 15	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ½ inch soil; thin to 2 to 4 inches.
Squash (summer)	Seed	May 24 to June 30	24” to 36”	1”	2 seeds per hole; thin weaker seedlings.
Squash (winter)	Seed	June 5 to 15	72” (between hills)	1”	4 seeds per hill; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.
Sweet Potato	Slips	May 24 to June 15	12”		Plant in raised ridge 8 inches tall.
Tomato	Transplant	May 24 to June 15	24 “to 36”		Bury transplant up to bottom two leaves.
Turnip	Seed	May 15 to Aug. 5 (fall crop)	2”	½”	Thin to 4 inches when plants are 4 inches tall.
Watermelon	Seed	May 24 to July 1	48” to 72”	1”	3 to 4 seeds per hole; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.

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. Two dates mean the crop can be planted twice for both a summer and fall harvest.

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 1 to July 15 (fall crop)	12” to 24”		
Carrots	Seed	April 1 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	April 10 to May 1, July 10 to 20	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 1	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 10 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	March 12 to May 1	1”	1”	
Pepper	Transplant	May 10 to July 15	24”		
Potato	Tuber	April 1 to 15	12”	2”	
Pumpkin	Seed	May 10 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 Crowns	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, July 21 to Aug. 30	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.

Southern Illinois Planting Guide

Planting date ranges below are recommendations for southern Illinois based on average first and last frost dates for the region. Always confirm plant dates with plant tags and seed packets. Two dates mean the crop can be planted twice for both a summer and fall harvest.

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Asparagus	Crowns	March 1 to April 1	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	April 26 to June 1, July 1 to July 15	2” to 4”	1”	
Bean (pole)	Seed	April 26 to June 1	4” to 6”	1”	
Beets	Seed	March 27 to July 30	1”	½”	Soak in water 24 hours before planting; thin seedlings to 2 inches apart.
Broccoli	Transplant	March 27 to April 15, July 15 to 30	12” to 24”	¼ “ to ½”	
Cabbage	Transplant	March 18 to July 30	12” to 24”		
Carrots	Seed	March 18 to July 30	½”	½”	Mix with sand or soil to spread seed more evenly; keep moist during germination; thin to 1 inch.
Cauliflower	Transplant	June 27 to July 6	18” to 24”		
Chard	Seed or Transplant	March 27 to May 15, July 7 to 21	2” to 4”	1”	Thin to 6 inches if seeded.
Corn	Seed	April 15 to June 25	12”	1”	
Cucumber	Seed	April 27 to June 1	12”	1”	
Eggplant	Transplant	April 27 to June 1	18” to 24”		
Endive	Seed	March 15 to April 15, July 7 to Aug. 1	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 9 inches.
Garlic	Clove	late October	2” to 4”	1” to 2”	
Kale	Transplant	March 15 to April 15, July 7 to 18	6”	½”	Thin to 12 inches.
Kohlrabi	Seed	March 10 to 20, June 15	4”	½”	
Lettuce	Seed	March 15 to April 15, June 15 to Aug. 15	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ¼ inch of soil; thin to 4 inches; consider shade for late plantings.
Muskmelon	Seed	May 6 to 28	24”		
Mustard	Seed	March 15 to April 15, June 15 to Aug. 15	4”	½”	
Okra	Transplant	April 26 to June 1	12” to 24”		

Southern Illinois Planting Guide (continued)

Vegetable	Type	Planting Date Range	Space Apart (Inches)	Sowing Depth (Inches)	Growing Instructions
Onion (green)	Sets	March 11 to April 15	2”	1”	
Onion (bulb)	Sets	March 11 to April 15	4”	1”	
Parsnip	Seed	April 15 to July 7 (fall crop)	3”	½”	Thin to 18 to 24 inches.
Peas	Seed	March 27 to April 15	1”	1”	
Pepper	Transplant	May 15 to June 30	24”		
Potato	Tuber	March 15 to 30	12”	2”	
Pumpkin	Seed	May 5 to 25	36” to 72” (between hills)	1”	5 seeds per hill; thin to 2 or 3 best seedlings.
Radish	Seed	March 20 to May 15, July 15 to Aug. 15	1” to 4”	½”	
Rhubarb	Roots or Crowns	March 11 to May 1, July 7 to 14	24”	2”	Perennial crop.
Rutabaga	Seed	April 15 to July 7 (fall crop)	2”	½”	Thin to 6 inches when plants are 2 inches tall.
Spinach	Seed	March 11 to April 1, July 7 to Aug. 15	Broadcast seed		Top dress with ½ inch soil; thin to 2 to 4 inches.
Squash (summer)	Seed	April 28 to June 1	24” to 36”	1”	2 seeds per hole; thin weaker seedlings.
Squash (winter)	Seed	May 6 to May 15	72” (between hills)	1”	4 seeds per hill; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.
Sweet Potato	Slips	April 28 to May 15	12”		Plant in raised ridge 8 inches tall.
Tomato	Transplant	April 28 to May 15	24 “to 36”		Bury transplant up to bottom two leaves.
Turnip	Seed	April 15 to July 7 (fall crop)	2”	½”	Thin to 4 inches when plants are 4 inches tall.
Watermelon	Seed	April 28 to June 1	48” to 72”	1”	3 to 4 seeds per hole; thin to 2 strongest seedlings.

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