

MARCH VEGETABLE GARDEN 2026

Phenology:

It is a legitimate field of science that studies the timing of recurring biological life cycles in relation to climate and environment. It is widely used to track impacts of climate change, such as shifting bloom times, using indicator plants to determine when certain weather conditions will prevail, when to plant certain crops and when certain insect pests will be active. Phenology studies natural events—season to season and year to year—to understand the natural cycles of ecosystems.

Phenology is an interesting science that ascribes to what I believe-**pay attention to what is going on outside in nature at certain times of the year.** This can sometimes serve as cues for the gardener for when to plant. Is it fool proof? Maybe, but neither is weather forecasting and I pay attention to that too. Is anything really foolproof?

Here is a list of phenology tips I've compiled from many sources. Are they all true? Probably not, but wouldn't it be interesting if we pay attention, write down our observations and note our own phenology observations for our local conditions in our own gardens. I'm going to give it a try for a few years and see if I OBSERVE any similarities to these tips below. Some of them are sort of humorous so I hope you enjoy them.

- Plant lettuce, spinach, and peas when the lilacs show their first true leaves or when the daffodils bloom.
- Plant spinach, radishes and broad beans (which are fava beans) as soon as frost is out of the ground.
- Plant peas when the daffodils begin to bloom. I like to plant peas on St Patrick's Day and spinach even earlier (like 1st week of March)
- Plant beans when lilacs are in full bloom. (not sure of this one around here-seems early)
- Plant cucumbers and squash when the lilacs fade.
- Grasshopper eggs hatch when the lilac blooms.
- Plant tomatoes, peppers, and early corn when daylilies start to bloom (I'm going to watch this one closely as I have daylilies)
- Set tomatoes out when lily-of-the-valley is in full bloom. (Do any of you have this plant?)

- Plant corn when elm leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear or when oak leaves are the size of a mouse's ear (Ok, I'll just get out the ruler and measure those mice ears and compare)
- Plant perennials when maple leaves begin to unfurl
- Prune roses when the forsythia blooms (this one makes sense)
- Plant pansies, snapdragons, and other hardy annuals after the aspens and chokecherry trees are leafed out. This indicates no more hard frosts.
- Plant annuals when you see new growth on green ash, grapes.
- Plant annuals when peaches and plums are in full bloom.
- Plant morning glory seeds when maples are fully leafed out.
- When Foxgloves open, Mexican bean beetles appear.
- Corn-"Knee high by the Fourth of July" (yes, yes!)
- Plant peppers and eggplant outside when bearded iris is in bloom. (I'll be watching closely on this one too)
- When lilac plants have leafed out, plant lettuce, peas and other cool weather varieties. When liac flowers are in full bloom, plant beans and squash. When its flowers have faded plant cucumbers and squash.
- When yellow forsythia and crocus bloom, prune roses

To learn more about this subject, go to National Phenology Network-Natures Notebook

THINGS TO DO IN MARCH

-SOIL-GOOD SOIL FERTILITY MEANS GOOD CROP YIELDS

Get your soil tested to see what amendments you might need to add to it. I'm going to Colorado State University for my soil test.

-CLEAN UP BEDS

Finish cleaning up your gardens/add compost.

-Direct seed outside in the garden-COOL SEASON vegetable seeds on ST. PATRICK'S DAY or sooner when SOIL temperature is 50°F or warmer. Some varieties include spinach, arugula, bok choy, chard, onions, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi, cabbage, peas, radishes, mustard, kale and other greens. Cover with row cover till they germinate to keep birds from eating the baby seedlings and for cold nights. Leave on till about 2 inches tall, then cover at night only.

GARLIC/SHALLOTS-Plant garlic, onions and shallots in spring as soon as soil can be worked. No row cover necessary.

FRUIT TREES

-Finish pruning your fruit trees in MARCH-before the buds swell. Remove all watersprouts which are sprouts that grow vertically.

-Spray your fruit trees with Dormant oil or Horticultural oil before their buds turn color to smother any dormant bugs.

-APPLE TREE WORMS-CODDLING MOTHS (Hang 2 pheromone traps per apple tree to capture male Coddling moths before they can fertilize female eggs. PUT OUT TRAPS WHEN APPLE BLOSSOMS ARE IN THE PINK STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT NOT AFTER THEY FULLY BLOOM (You will be too late). Moths hatch mid-March to early April.

-Spray with SPINOSAD 3x-10 days apart in spring. Spinosad is a biological product made from a naturally occurring bacterium that does not hurt beneficial insects or people. You can find this at nurseries or online.

SEEDS I can start INSIDE IN MARCH?

TOMATOES-YES INSIDE/NO OUTSIDE or buy plants at a nursery later

Start tomato seeds inside, in germination trays, on a heat mat with a thermostat, under lights 5-7 weeks indoors before May 15. Look at my website to explore more info on how to start seeds inside.

PEPPERS/EGGPLANTS-PLANT SEEDS INSIDE or buy plants at a nursery later

Pepper and eggplant seeds should be started from seeds 8-12 weeks

inside on heat mats with a thermostat, under lights.

ALL COOL SEASON CROPS/SPINACH, LETTUCE, GREENS-YES-Plant inside or outside with protection

All cool season crops can be started inside in March under lights, with no heat mats and some plant seedlings outside with row cover protection from late-March weather permitting.

PLANT THESE CROPS OUTSIDE IN MARCH

COOL SEASON CROPS PLANTED OUTSIDE by direct seeding (Cover all new seedlings with medium weight row cover for protection from cold nites). Keep moist daily for germination.

-peas-Plant around St. Patrick's Day

-Fava Beans-PLANT MID-MARCH-great flavor and likes the cold

-cold hardy lettuce-MID-MARCH/APRIL

-Asian greens-pak choi, tatsoi, bok choi, mustards

-radishes-plant in March/April

-spinach-very cold hardy

-arugula-very cold hardy

-endive-very cold hardy

CROPS TO WAIT TO PLANT TILL APRIL BY SEED:

-beets-EARLY-MID APRIL

-carrots-EARLY-MID-APRIL

-chard- APRIL

-kale-EARLY-MID APRIL

*Don't forget the Seed Library. The Seed Library opens on March 14 where gardeners can get free seeds and on the Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners site, sfemg.org., they have information sheets on growing plants from seeds.