



# Winter Planning for Growing Vegetables

February 8, 2026

# Agenda

## Welcome

- Our Growing Season
- Why start some vegetables inside?
- Why do you only direct sow some vegetables?
- What foods can you winter sow
- Can I grow it in a container?
- Understanding the seed package
- Starting potatoes/sweet potatoes



J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
15/36 Low temp/High temp	20/39	28/48	38/58	47/70	55/78	61/84	59/81	51/73	41/62	34/53	22/41
9.5 Hrs Sunlight	10.5	12	13.5	14.5	15	15	14	12.5	11	10	9
31/31 Days mth/yr	28/59	31/90	30/120	31/151	30/181	31/212	31/243	30/273	31/304	30/334	31/365
			Last frost 4/20	Growing season ~180 days					First frost 10/15		



**Watertown Community Garden**

**Sow outdoors** - 2 to 4 weeks before frost  
soil temp 40f day time temp 60-70

**Sow indoors** 4 to 6 weeks before frost  
and every 3 weeks - and when outside  
temp is in the 80's

LETTUCE  
*Parris  
Island Cos*



Seedling

**Days to Emerge:**  
5 - 10 Days

**Seed Depth:**  
Surface to 1/8"

**Seed Spacing:**  
A group of  
3 seeds every 10"

**Row Spacing:**  
16"

**Thinning:**  
When 1/2" tall,  
thin to 1 every 10"

**Maturity:**  
21 - 68 Days

Date Seed Sown

Crunchy leaves, buttery-green heart, and vigorous growth are a few ways to describe 'Parris Island Cos'. Developed by the USDA and Clemson U. around 1950, this 10"-12", upright lettuce will soon be a favorite in your garden and your kitchen, full grown or as a baby green in as little as 21 days. Ideal for lettuce wraps. Heat resistant, tipburn resistant, and mosaic virus tolerant. *This packet sows up to 369 feet.*

**When to sow outside:** RECOMMENDED.

2 to 4 weeks before your average last frost date, and when soil temperature is at least 40°F, ideally 60°-70°F.

**Successive Sowings:** Every 3 weeks until 4 to 6 weeks before your average first fall frost date. *Mild Climates:* Sow in fall and winter for cool season harvests.

**When to start inside:** 4 to 6 weeks before your average last frost date, and in summer when soil temperatures are too warm (above 80°F) to germinate lettuce seed.

cut out for  
plant tag

**OPEN POLLINATED  
AND  
UNTREATED**



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# Why start some vegetables inside?

Vegetables that have a long maturity, need to be started before the weather outside is warm enough for them.

Warm weather examples are : tomato, pepper, and eggplants. These vegetables take 75-110 days to produce fruit. Start 6-8 weeks before the last frost. (late Jan, early Feb) Transplant after last frost.

Cold hardy examples are: Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, lettuce, spinach, swiss chard. Start 4-7 weeks before the last frost. (March or April)



# Why do you direct sow some veggies?

Simply some vegetables do not thrive if transplanted.

- Root crops: carrots, beets, radishes, turnup
- Legumes: peas and beans
- Squashes: cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupe, and zucchini

Many of these can be started indoors if they are given enough soil in the pots so the roots do not need to be disturbed when transplanted.



# What can be winter sown?

Winter sowing is a method of starting seeds inside a milk jug, or other mostly closed up plastic container with holes to let in and release moisture. The method was developed to start perennials outside with little to no effort.

This method can be used for most herbs.

One of the biggest advantages is that seedlings do not need to be hardened off, because they grew outside.



# Understanding Seed packages

when to sow outside -

when to sow indoors -

time to sprout -

time to maturity -

spacing -

when to stop sowing -



# Understanding seed labels

Seed labels tell you key information you need to grow  
sprouting time - days example 15-20 days

days to maturity -100-160

Temperature - 60-80'

seed depth -  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch

Plant spacing - 10"

frost Hardy Yes/No

min Full Sun 6-12 hrs

When to start (in doors 6-12 weeks before last frost)



Romaine Lettuce ( for example)

When to sow outside- 2 to 4 weeks before average last frost (April 20th ) Direct sow seeds between March 23rd and April 6th then every 2 weeks until it gets to 80 deg average temperature.

When to sow indoors - 4 to 6 weeks before the average last frost - Plant between March 9th and March 23rd  
time to sprout - 5-10 days  
time to maturity - 21-68 days



# Vegetable & herbs ideal for winter sowing:

- Root vegetables - carrots, beets, radishes, turnips (note: use enough soil to transplant without disrupting the roots.)
- Cold Hardy - broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts
- Alliums - onions, scallions, leeks
- Herbs - parsley, basil, oregano, sage, thyme, dill, (many mints)
- ~Fruits - Tomato, Peppers, eggplant (This year I am testing these crops with winter sowing)



# Starting Vegetables indoors:

- Seed starting soil - it is best to get a seed starting mix. These have good drainage.
- Fertilizing - after the second set of 'real leaves' emerge use an organic vegetable fertilizer mixed with 10:1 more water than recommended for outside.
- pots - rather than small cells - use pots that will give the roots some space to grow -
- Lights - Lights need to be placed 2-3 inches above the plants.
- Temperature - look at the seed package and get a seed starting heating pad if your house is not kept at the ideal temperature for the plants
- hardening off - slowly expose your plants to outdoors 1-2 hours at a time increasing the time outside for one to two weeks.
- Transplanting - try to limit the stress to roots, dig the holes use a mild fertilizer and water in the hole then place the plant in the hole and gently press it into place.



# Direct Sow into the garden:

- Prepare your soil, work compost or a mild fertilizer in where you plan to plant.
- Check your seed package for time to plant. A general rule is to plant peas, by St Patricks day. (mid March)
- Space seeds so the plants can have enough room to grow.
- Use labels so you know what you planted where.
- If your plants will need a trellis, this is the time to set it up.



# Winter sow

- Don't use seed starting soil, get a good **potting** mix.
- Prepare your jugs - drain holes in the bottom and sides, holes along the top, cut the jug at least 4" from the bottom leaving a hinge where the handle is.
- Fill the jugs to 4" deep with damp potting soil.
- Spread a large number of seeds across the top of the soil. The general rule is plant the seeds as deep as the seed is, so small seeds sit on the top of the soil, seeds  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch get placed  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch below the surface.
- Tape up and label the jugs.
- Place the jugs outside where they can get exposed to the weather.



# Starting Root Crops from Potatoes

Potatoes

Sweet Potatoes



# Starting Root Crops- Potatoes

- Start with organic
- Wash the outside of the vegetables gently; not damaging any chits that might be starting
- Chits are the eyes that sprout new plants



Are Sprouted Potatoes ...

52 Food52



# Starting Root Crops-

## Potatoes sprouting chits

### Method 1

- Place potatoes in an egg carton. You want air to be able to circulate around the potato.
- Place a damp towel over the potatoes
- Move to a cool place about 50 to 60 degree or warmer. Place in a window that lets light in, but is not necessary sunny.



Are Sprouted Potatoes ...

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# Starting Root Crops- Potatoes sprouting chits

## Method 2

- Wrap your potatoes in a damp paper towels or newspaper
- Put them in a mesh bag with an onion
- Move to a cool place about 50 to 60 degree or warmer. Place in a window that lets light in, but is not necessary sunny.



Are Sprouted Potatoes ...

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# Starting Root Crops- Potatoes

When the Chits are  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long:

- Look to see how many eyes have sprouted.
- If you want big potatoes take a knife and cut out all but two of the eyes, for smaller potatoes leave all the eyes.
- You can also cut the potato into sections that all have chits sprouted.
- The cut potato needs to be dried for a few days or dipped in wood ash prior to planting.



Are Sprouted Potatoes ...

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# Starting Root Crops- Potatoes

Planting the potatoes:

Potato plants need about 2.5 gallons of dirt to grow. You can plant two potato plants (two chits) in a 5 gallon bucket. You need to add drainage holes in the bottom. I put about an inch of rocks, then 5 inches of soil place the potatoes with the chit up and cover with 4-5 inches of dirt. Add a layer of mulch on the top.

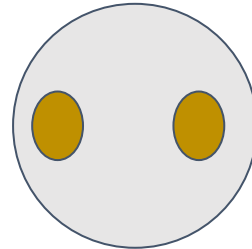
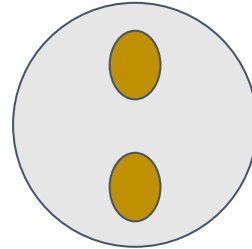


# Starting Root Crops- Potatoes

Double your yield with 10 gallon buckets!

Plant two layers of potatoes

- Layer rocks
- 4 inches of soil
- Potatoes
- 4 inches of soil
- Potatoes
- Soil
- Mulch



# Starting Root Crops- Sweet Potatoes

## Starting slips

Sweet potatoes grow from Slips

- Method 1  
Put the sweet potato in water
- Method 2  
Put the sweet potato in dirt



# Starting Root Crops- Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes grow from Slips

- We take the sweet potato and develop slips
- Root the slips
- Plant the plants



How to Grow Sweet Potatoes In ...



Good Housekeeping



# Starting Root Crops- Sweet Potatoes

Slips need to be rooted in water

- each slip will grow 5-6 sweet potatoes
- plants need 12" across and at least 12" of depth
- Soil should be ½ starting mix ½ potting soil - to give a loose mix
- Plant the plants



# Starting Root Crops- Sweet Potatoes

## Growing the sweet potatoes

- Sweet potatoes need a minimum 100 days
- Keep them moist, but make sure there is good drainage
- Plant one slip in a 10 gallon fabric grow bag - yields 5-6 sweet potatoes
- In a 20 Gallon Grow Bag you can plant 3 - 4 slips
- Layer 4" soil 5-5-5 organic fertilizer then another 4" of soil



# Upcoming Events

Check out the events page:

<https://watertowncommunitygardens.wildapricot.org/Events>

March 14th is the 3rd annual Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Cleanup 10-12 490 Arsenal Way

March 25th 5:00-6:30 Roadside Gardening Demo Part 1 - details sent to registrants.

March 26th 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM Volunteer on the Greenway Starts weekly Invasive Removal



# Closing

Thank you!

What are your thoughts?

Suggestions?

Comments?

Email us: [info@watertowngardens.org](mailto:info@watertowngardens.org)



**Watertown Community Garden**