



How-To: **TRANSPLANTING SEEDLINGS**

Transplanting seedlings into the garden helps provide an earlier harvest and starts off plants with the correct spacing. Transplanting also avoids the most vulnerable time for garden crops - when they've just sprouted. Here's how and when to plant, to set your seedlings up for success!



STUDENTS PREPARING RAISED BEDS FOR TRANSPLANTING



AN IN-GROUND SCHOOL GARDEN BED PREPARED FOR TOMATO TRANSPLANTS



CAREFULLY PLANTING A WATERMELON IN A RAISED BED — THIS PLANT WILL NEED LOTS OF SPACE!

WHEN TO TRANSPLANT

In Pittsburgh, the last heavy frost date is usually around the beginning to middle of May. So around mid-May it's generally safe to plant summer crops, like tomatoes, peppers, and summer squash. For the first few weeks, keep an eye on the forecast. If it looks like a frost could occur, cover plants overnight with an old sheet or other thin fabric to insulate them. Cool-season crops, like lettuce, broccoli, and onions can be planted as early as several weeks before the last frost date. For more crop planting dates, see the Info Hub Sheet *Indoor Seeding Schedule*.

PREPARING TO TRANSPLANT

1. If you haven't already, make a plan for what plants will go where in your garden. Use a seed catalog to determine how much space each plant will need, then map how many plants will fit in your garden area.

2. Get the soil ready.

- Ground beds: Weed, then till, dig, or otherwise loosen the soil where the plants will go. Add soil amendments and/or compost. Prepare an area large enough for your plants to be spaced correctly.
- Raised beds: Weed and loosen the soil if it is compacted. Add soil amendments and/or compost.
- Containers: Select containers that are big enough for the mature stage of the plants you want to grow. Remember that tall plants can overturn a small pot, especially on a windy day! As a general rule, choose the largest pot size possible for each plant. Fill the containers with new, high-quality potting mix, or replace 1/3 of the volume of old potting mix with compost.

3. Select seedlings. If you did not grow your own, purchase your seedlings from a reputable local nursery or natural food store. Or, check with a gardener friend for extras. Ask whether the seedlings have already been hardened off. To harden off seedlings, take at least a week to gradually introduce them to outdoor weather. For more information, please see Info Hub Sheet *Preparing Seedlings for Planting*.

PLANTING SEEDLINGS

Try to plant in a morning or evening, or when the weather is cloudy. Direct sun can be hard on seedlings as they adjust to their new home. A cloudy day with light rain can be an ideal transplanting day, if the soil is already prepared.

1. Dig holes just deep enough for the plants' roots. Space holes to give each plant room to grow to its mature size. Check out a seed catalog if you are unsure about spacing.

2. Carefully remove each seedling from its pot. If its roots twirl in a circle or have grown into a mat, gently loosen them.



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URBAN FARMERS IN TRAINING
WATERING NEWLY PLANTED
SEEDLINGS

3. Place each seedling in its hole. Most seedlings should be planted to the same depth as they were growing in their pots. However, tomatoes (which can grow roots from the stem) can be buried deeper, if they are too tall or thin. Planting deeper stabilizes the plant.

4. Fill the hole in with loose soil, pressing gently but firmly to remove air pockets from around the roots. The soil around the seedling should be slightly lower than the rest of the garden soil, so water will collect around the plant.

5. Water and fertilize the seedlings, to help prevent transplant shock. Use a diluted organic fertilizer (a mixture of fish and seaweed works well, or compost tea), and water each seedling well. Alternatively, sprinkle some compost around each plant and water well with plain water.

TIPS

- Mulch your new seedlings to conserve water use and keep back weeds. A thick layer of straw or brown leaves works well.
- Young seedlings can be more susceptible to frost than older plants. Watch the forecast, and cover seedlings at night if the temperatures threaten to dip into the 30's.
- If the weather is hot and sunny, consider covering your seedlings with thin fabric for part of the day, until they begin to look hearty and grow new leaves.
- Keep an eye on your baby seedlings, especially in the first few weeks, and water them if the soil dries out.