



Gardening Tips & Techniques: Planting Seedlings

It's about that time! In Pittsburgh, our last heavy frost date is usually around the beginning to middle of May. So, around mid-May it's generally safe time plant summer crops, like tomatoes! That being said, if you plant now keep an eye on the forecast. If it looks like a frost could occur, cover your plants overnight with an old sheet or thin cloth to insulate them.

Check out [this link](#) for information about which crops to plant when. The chart also includes information about whether a particular crop performs best when seeded or transplanted, or if either planting method works.

How to Transplant Seedlings

Step 1: Using seed catalogs or the chart linked above, make sure it's the right time to plant the crops you're planning to grow.

Step 2: If you haven't already, make a plan for your garden.

- Use seed catalogs or [this chart](#) to determine how much space each plant will need.

Step 3: Get the soil ready.

For ground beds:

- Weed, till, dig, or otherwise loosen the soil where the plants will go.
- Add soil amendments or compost.
- Prepare an area large enough for your plants to be spaced correctly.

For raised beds:

- Weed and loosen the soil if it is compacted.
- Add soil amendments or compost.

For containers:

- Select containers that are big enough for the mature stage of the plants you want to grow. The chart at the bottom of [this article](#) gives a good idea of how much soil each crop requires. Remember that tall plants can overturn a small pot, especially on a windy day! As a general rule, choose the largest recommended pot size.
- Fill the containers with a high-quality potting mix or replace 1/3 of the volume of old potting mix (from healthy plants) with compost.

Step 4: Select your seedlings.

- Purchase from a reputable local nursery or natural food store. [Grow Pittsburgh offers seedlings](#) Tues.-Sun. at the Frick Art & Historical Center Greenhouse, through June 16. We'll also have a booth, along with lots of other great local suppliers at May Market at Phipps (Mother's Day weekend). Or, check with a gardener friend for extras. People who start their own seedlings often have surplus to share.

Step 5: Plant seedlings.

- Try to plant in a morning or evening, or when the weather is cloudy. Direct sun can be hard on a seedling as it adjusts to its new home.
- Dig holes just deep enough for the plants' roots. Space holes to give each plant room to grow to its mature size (check out this chart or a seed catalog for more info).
- Carefully remove each seedling from its pot. If its roots twirl in a circle or have grown into a mat, carefully loosen them.
- Place the seedling in its hole.
- If the hole is too deep, add more soil.
- If the hole is too shallow, dig until it is deep enough.
- 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 about slightly lower than the rest of the garden soil, so water will collect around the plant.

Step 6: Water the seedlings.

- Right after planting is a good time to fertilize the seedlings, to give the plants a boost and help avoid transplant shock.
- Use a diluted 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:

-Mulching your new seedlings is a great way to conserve water use and keep back weeds. Straw or brown leaves work well. A thick layer will offer the most benefit.

-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 mid 30's.

-Keep an eye on your baby seedlings, especially in the first few weeks, watering if the soil dries out.



Grow Pittsburgh staff plants leeks at the Frick Art & Historical Center Kitchen Garden.