

# Four Basic Veggie Categories & When It's Safe to Plant Them



*Flowers are blooming, the sun is shining and temperatures are rising. Spring is in the air! But don't let that fool you, frost can still happen. Read on for ways to know when it's okay to get your garden planted so you can avoid the frosty pitfalls.*

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## Spring has sprung, but frost still likely!

Determining when to plant a garden can be especially confusing in Utah's unpredictable, varied climate where last-frost dates can vary by many days within just a few miles. Many experienced gardeners have planted and later lost their plants to frost.

An example of how fickle Utah's climate can be is in Cache Valley. Frost-free days vary from an average of 113 days in Lewiston and Trenton to 158 days on the USU campus. Similar examples are common around the state.

Geographic characteristics of where you live can help in determining when to plant. When a yard is located in a populated area or on a mountain bench, it usually has a longer growing season. Other areas located at slightly lower elevations where cold air drains and cannot escape have a shorter season. This is why local commercial orchards are generally located on benches. Additionally, urban and suburban areas are slightly warmer than surrounding areas due to the urban heat effect. Heat from buildings and warmth generated by sunlight reflected from roads and other surfaces increases temperatures and delays frost. It can be helpful to chat with a local farmer or experienced gardener in your area to determine what works for him or her regarding when to plant.

In addition to frost information, it is important to take into account the needs of the plants. Vegetables planted locally fall into four basic categories: hardy, semi-hardy, tender and very tender. Depending on which category a plant belongs to, planting dates vary from early spring until early summer. Consider the following:

- Hardy vegetables, including asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, onions, peas and spinach, can be planted as soon as the soil is workable in early spring. This usually ranges between 45 and 60 days before the average last frost. These same vegetables can be safely planted until the average last frost date.
- Semi-hardy plants, such as beets, carrots, lettuce and potatoes, can be planted one to two weeks after the hardy group. These can be planted until the average last-frost date.
- Tender vegetables, such as celery, cucumbers, corn and most beans, should be planted on the average last-frost

date.

- Very tender plants, such as squash, beans, melons, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers, should not be planted until at least a week after the average last frost. Even if frost does not occur before this time, these plants will not grow well and are more susceptible to disease until warmer weather.

If you have lost plants to frost, you are not alone, and all you can do is try again.

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This article was written by Taun Beddes, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.