

As soon as the garden soil can be worked, the urge to plant something is hard to resist. However, one must take soil temperature (and the ever-present threat of frost) into account, when deciding what can be planted early.

There are a few vegetable seeds that can be planted in your garden fairly early, when the air and ground temperatures are still cool. Germination percentages are actually higher for certain seeds under cool conditions. While the time required to germinate may well be longer, the percentage of seeds that actually germinate is much higher. These plants can also withstand a light frost, and although growth may be checked for a day or two, the plant will not die.

Radish is one. Attempting to sow radish in the heat of summer may result in *very poor* (next to zero) germination. Radish is a cool weather crop and will bolt to seed in hot conditions. Keep this in mind because they also mature rather quickly, and will need to be harvested within 30 days after germination, leaving you with an “empty” spot in your garden. You have two options here. One would be to transplant pre-started plants into this area (example: tomato, cucumber, pepper). The other is to mix your radish seed with another that will also germinate in cooler conditions, but will mature much later in the season. Dill or Parsley comes to mind. By mixing your dill or parsley seeds in with the radish you have the added advantage of having your row “marked” by the radish, as both dill and parsley are slow germinators, and can take weeks (possibly up to 5-6 wks.) to emerge. The radish will also prevent the soil from crusting over while you are waiting for the parsley or dill. Also...keep in mind that parsley is biennial. If you do not roto-till it under, it will re-emerge the next year after planting. If it re-emerges the third year, it will want to bolt to seed.

Turnip seeds (NOT rutabaga) as well will germinate better in cooler soil temperatures. (4 ½°C). Since many of these varieties are typically harvested when small, some can be ready to harvest in 30-40 days., other varieties require 60 days. (choose a variety with a proper “days-to-maturity” indication) and in the meantime be sure to enjoy the turnip greens.

Lettuce is another seed that germinates much better in cooler conditions. Most lettuce also prefers cooler growing temperatures, and tends to bolt to seed when the hot late July and August temperatures hit.

Leaf lettuce is a good choice for the average back-yard garden. Most leaf-lettuce and even loose head, like Butterheads or Boston types, will re-grow after being cut. These grow quite quickly. You can usually expect to get at least three cuttings before it wants to bolt to seed; providing a nice supply of fresh lettuce for a couple of months. Cut the lettuce at least an inch above ground level with very sharp scissors or knife. Ensure the roots of the cut-off lettuce are well watered after cutting to encourage re-growth. Continually cutting the lettuce throughout the summer will also help to retard bolting. Grow romaine in your garden, and by harvesting only the larger, outer leaves, you will have romaine for much of the season as it is a lettuce type that is slow to bolt.

Spinach as well is a seed that germinates and grows best in cooler conditions. Spinach does however like to bolt to seed as soon as it experiences warmer conditions. Home gardeners can choose to grow Swiss Chard instead. By regularly harvesting the outer leaves from each plant, a steady supply of spinach-flavoured leaves can be had all season, until the frosts are heavy enough to freeze the plant. The leaves can also be harvested throughout the summer/Fall and frozen for winter use.

If Mother Nature cooperates, and we do not get frequent, early, continuously *heavy* frosts, you can try re-seeding many of these varieties in the fall, (labour day?) when the temperatures begin to cool, and possibly get a fall harvest of radish, lettuce or spinach.

Potatoes are also usually planted early in the season. But that is a topic for another day.

More at [www.fallfair.info](http://www.fallfair.info)