



Calgary and Area Herb Seed Starting and Planting Guide

Explanation of Calgary & Area Growing Season

What we can grow in our environment is largely based on the length of the growing season and coldest temperature.

- The growing season is determined by the average frost dates; it begins after the last frost (in spring) and the ends before the first frost (in autumn).
 - Last frost – is the last time it is cold enough for the dew to freeze (which can damage or kill plants).
 - First frost – is the first time it is cold enough for the dew to freeze. Most plants must be harvested prior to the first frost.
- The coldest temperature your area reaches determines the “Plant Hardiness Zones.” Hardiness zones determine the types of plants that can grow in a specific area, and more specifically the types of plants that will survive the coldest winter temperatures and continue to grow the next season.

Calgary and surrounding areas generally range from Zone 2B to 4A. Our growing season is generally about 114 days (May 23–Sept. 15) and is noted on the following chart by an orange line.*

***Tip! These are just guidelines based on year over year averages. Make sure to always check the weather and forecast to determine when you should plant.**

What does frost hardy mean? ❄️

Though most vegetables are damaged by frost, some vegetables are better at withstanding frost and can have a longer growing season.

Why should you start seeds indoors? ■ ■ ■

Starting your seeds indoors has multiple benefits:

1. You get to garden earlier and for longer!
2. It increases the length of the growing season, bringing the time to harvest or flower (for most plants) within the growing season.
3. Some plants have a hard time growing from seed in our environment. Starting from seed indoors increases the chance of survival by increasing the plant’s hardiness before it’s exposed to the elements.

What is direct sow? ● ● ●

Direct sow is when you plant seeds directly in soil outdoors. Some plants are hardy and grow fast enough to be planted directly outdoors.

What is plant vs. plant and cover? ◇ vs. ◇

Seedlings started indoors should be planted outdoors around or after the frost. If planted close to the last frost, some newly planted seedlings should be covered with a frost blanket at night.

What is transplanting?

Transplanting is when you move a plant to a larger container while it continues to grow indoors. Some plants may need to be transplanted multiple times before it can be planted in its final location outdoors. Be careful when you plant seedlings, they’re more delicate than larger plants.

What is repotting?

Ornamental container plants and houseplants live in their container for multiple years. Repotting is moving this ornamental or indoor plant from the container it has outgrown to a larger pot.

Why should you cover outdoor plants?

Nighttime temperatures can impact the growth of a plant, especially around the first and last frost of a year. Frost blankets or sheets can be used to cover seeds and plants to protect it from frost.

What does “days until harvest” mean?

Days until harvest is the time from planting to when you can begin harvesting. Harvesting is dependent on when you want to harvest and the weather; and it can vary between plant varieties.

- Ex. Harvest when ready: grown radishes
- Ex. Harvest for size: harvest a large vegetable because it may break. Or harvest some carrots when small and others later in the season when they’re larger.
- Ex. Harvest continually: Some plants, like herbs and tomatoes, continue to grow and can be harvested throughout the season.

Harvest vs. maturity

Harvest time is when a plant or vegetable is ready to eat. Plant maturity is when the plant has reached its full potential, this primarily applies to perennial plants. Asparagus, for example, will not meet its full potential until multiple growing seasons have passed.

Annuals vs. biennial vs. perennials

Annual plants will not survive the winter and are replanted the following year. Biennial plants have a two-year life cycle; they grow one year, flower, self-seed and die the next. Seed additional flowers the next year to ensure flowers develop every year and the plants continue to self seed. Perennial plants can survive winter and regrow the following season. Whether a plant is an annual or perennial depends on the hardiness zone.

