

## The Importance of Timing When Planting Veggies

I find the timing of when to plant veggies can be critical for success. May is a huge planting time for most of us so let's go over what to plant and when to plant.

### Cool Season Crops

**Spinach** will bolt when daylight hours are longer than 14 hours, which will be on May 15 here in the greater Santa Fe area. Longer daylight hours make spinach bolt and temperatures warmer than 80 degrees speeds up the process. So it is now too late to start spinach. I have great spinach still but put out transplants in February in the house. So it is not only the warmer days but daylight hours can be a factor as well with some plants.

**Kale and Chard** are two crops that are considered cool season crops but do marvelous in summer as well as into late fall. If you like these two crops, still not too late to plant them. In fact I have some Chard that made it through the winter. I treat it as an annual even though it is a **biennial plant**. Biennial means it has a two-year life span but it puts it's energy into making seeds the second year and not as many leaves.

### The heart of the summer garden-warm season crops!

**Peppers**-let's start with peppers. Do not, I repeat do not plant pepper transplants in the garden until June 1. Why? They will stall out and stop growing if planted too early and mid-May is too early for peppers here at 7000' high. They do not like cold nights. And forget about growing them from seeds now. We do not have a long enough growing season. I use to start peppers in February inside, under lights and on heat mats. February! Now I just buy transplants from Agua Fria Nursery who has many different varieties. I let them do the work!

**Eggplants**-Plant them as transplants on June 1 as well.

**Beans, corn, squash, pumpkins, melons, cucumbers and zucchini** are warm season crops that can all be planted by seeds. I will put them in end of May through first week of June. But I find that rollie pollies may chew them off at the ground when they first germinate so I use **SLUGGO PLUS**, an organic deterrent for them. Sluggo Plus controls slugs, snails, earwigs, sow bugs (roly poly), pill bugs, and cut worms too. I use to have to keep replanting the seeds until I discovered who was eating them. I put the seeds in the ground and sprinkle the Sluggo Plus pellets around where I planted them and once they germinate, I sprinkle a little more around the baby plants. Once they reach 3 high, you can stop using it as they like the newly germinated plants. I do however put **row cover** over the area where I planted as birds can be a problem too, liking the newly germinated plants as well.

## Tomatoes! My favorite warm season crop!

High Temperatures-Last year, with the summers getting warmer, I had tomato blossom drop in June when they first produced flowers. Blossom drop is caused by too high a temperature or too low but around here, it is mostly caused by too high a temperature in June when they first produce blossoms. When tomatoes are trying to set their blossoms into fruit, temperatures over 92°F will cause blossom drop. Last June, it was 92+ degrees most of June. The temperature is critical at this time. The tomatoes will still continue to produce blossoms but will only set them under the magic temperature of 92°F. So when they produced more blossoms in July, they finally set fruit as the monsoons came in and cooled the temperatures. Tomatoes can handle higher heat, just not while they are setting fruit from their blossoms. This meant we started harvesting tomatoes much later. When I first starting growing tomatoes here, I use to get enough tomatoes to go to the SF Farmers Market in mid-July. Last year, I didn't have enough till end of August. Now I got tomatoes earlier, but not many.

So this year I'm going to plant them this first week of May. I'm going to try to get them to set fruit before the higher heat comes in June. I will put them in Walls-of Waters as I do every year to protect them from those chilly nights we still can get. But Wall of Waters are suppose to **protect the plant from cold as low as 12° F**. My thinking is if they set fruit earlier, I will get to harvest them earlier. But this is a crap shoot as May 15<sup>th</sup> is the first frost free day by USDA Hardiness Zone charts here for Santa Fe so I'm putting them around two weeks early. So I've grown extras in case they don't make it and you can always buy smaller plants. You don't want the really tall plants but instead purchase the shorter plants that can fit inside the Wall of Waters. They also offer protection from our horrid winds. I use them for peppers too since they like heat. Be sure to take them off once the temperatures are high in June or reach the top of the WOWs.

*'The Wall O Water Season Extender uses a series of 18 tubes that are filled with water to form a rigid wall of water surrounding the plant. During the day, that water is warmed by the sun and this heat is retained to insulate the plant from cold conditions'.*

Where can you get them? Most nurseries here in town carry them. Call first to make sure they have them. They come 3 in a pak and are around \$15-16 for a pak. A cheaper source is *Planet Natural* online. Big box stores do NOT carry them.