

Summer Home & Garden



When to Plant Vegetables

Greenhouses and indoor gardens means gardening is now a year-round venture. But for a traditional garden, April is when people should start their planting. Urban Farmer walks gardeners through when to plant which crops to set yourself up for the best results.

Before you do, however, check the U.S. Department of Agriculture for your growing zone and know what weather patterns you're likely to be working with.

While some vegetables do better when developed as seedlings and transplanted — such as peppers, herbs and tomatoes, which are the most popular vegetable in gardens — others do better when planted as seeds. These include beans, peas, corn, carrots, radishes, pumpkins and cucumbers. When you start planting, either seeds or seedlings, make sure the soil has been warm for several days in a row.

APRIL

Gardeners who started growing plants indoors should start transplanting those to the garden, but it's certainly not too late for people starting with seeds, even for tomatoes and peppers, according to Urban Farmer. Beans, beets, cabbage (one of the easiest plants to grow), carrots, corn, cucumbers, lettuce, melons, herbs and onions all should be planted in April. Peas, if planted in April and with a little help from good weather, can be ready for harvest by May.

April can be the most difficult month. Many plants need the germinating time and should be planted in April, but a lot of Americans live in climate zones where a final freeze in April isn't unusual. Be prepared to cover plants in the event of bad weather.

MAY

If cold weather or a busy spring kept you from too much planting in



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April, there's still time. Many of those same plants thrive in the consistently warm soil and air that gardeners are likely to see in May. Plants such as squash, beans, cucumbers and melons are good kitchen staples that can

be planted in May.

JUNE AND BEYOND

You can plant summer squash and zucchini in June to get a crop in late July or early August. That's the same

with lettuce, and carrots can be planted in June or even beyond. Some varieties of beans, like Contender, Kentucky Wonder and Topcrop, can be ready for harvest in just more than a month.

Easy Home Renovations

Spring cleaning is done, the weather is warm and people are returning to the outdoors — often discovering their houses need a little TLC.

For anyone comfortable with a ladder, paint rollers and a hammer, there are a number of do-it-yourself home renovations to spruce up your house and not break the bank.

This Old House Magazine offered a number of suggestions.

PLANT A TREE

Planting an oak or elm for shade, a fruit tree for food, or an evergreen or two to act as a windblocker and a fence can spruce up the yard and block winds. This is long-term investment, but if you want reasonably quick results; research types of trees and find one that grows quickly. TOH said an Arborvitae Green Giant, an evergreen, can grow three feet in a year. Your local nursery can point you to the right tree for your space and climate.

INSTALL A CEILING FAN OR A CHANDELIER

Keep your heating and cooling costs down with a vintage-looking ceiling fan, or class up a room with fancy-looking overhead lights. You can change the look and feel of a room by dressing up the ceiling some. You can also add a ceiling medallion around a hanging light fixture. Visit a local lighting store for a wide selection of either.

PAINT YOUR FRONT DOOR

Painting always takes longer than you plan, and usually ends up with more paint in places it's not supposed to be than you would like, so painting a room or an outdoor wall is a big undertaking. But your front door is smaller and more doable and is the first thing people see when they come in, so why not give it a facelift? Go with something vibrant and fun — red or green, perhaps — or a more traditional but warm wood color.

FIX UP THE FLOOR

New carpets and hardwood are expensive. You can, however, refinish your vinyl floor so it looks like stone tile. TOH suggested using two colors to create the stones and white paint to create lines between the stones. Finish it with coats of polyurethane to seal the surface.

BUILD A PLANTER

Add a garden to your home, regardless of space. You can build an outdoor planter from wood planks, frame it, attach the sides and the bottom and line the box with plastic. These can be larger, for a backyard, or small enough to fit on windowsills. Then hit the garden store for plants to fill it.



Square Foot Gardening

Interested in growing vegetables, but don't have a lot of space? Square foot gardening may be your solution. According to the Square Foot Gardening Foundation, this method, which separates a gardening box into 12-inch by 12-inch squares, with a different crop in each square, saves time, tools, water, and of course, space.

The popularity of square foot gardening is growing throughout the world, particularly in Third World countries where residents rely on home-grown food to eat but rarely have much space to plant a garden.

This inventive form of gardening was started by Mel Bartholomew, gardened as a hobby after he retired from his work as a civil engineer. It can be done on rooftops, yards and plots of all sizes, such as community gardens.

While there is some strategy to square foot gardening, it isn't harder to grow successful square foot garden, and there are many ways in which it's easier — little weeding, no rototilling and no heavy tools. It starts with a box, good dirt and an irrigation system.

THE BOX

Square foot gardening boxes are available to buy, but you can also build your own. Use untreated wood, or only treat the outside of the box, to avoid the chemicals having contact with the soil. Brick, cement, vinyl and even recycled plastic can be used to build the box. Put weed mat on ground beneath the box to ensure you don't get weeds in your garden.

THE SOIL

It's just dirt, right? Not really.



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While you can garden in many types of soil, the foundation recommended equal parts coarse grade vermiculite, sphagnum peat moss and organic compost. For a 4-foot by 4-foot box, you need about one cubic yard of soil. Squash may need a little extra space as well. Tomatoes and peas will

need some structure to climb up.

THE GRID

Add the grid using old window blinds or wood, showing the gardener exactly how much space is available for each crop. This could also be done using twine. The most

important factor is to be able to easily delineate each square.

THE PLANTS

Most backyard garden crops can also be grown in a square foot garden. If you want to grow tubers (potatoes, yams), carrots or other root vegetables, ensure your garden is

deep enough that they can grow underneath the soil.

FUTURE YEARS

For best success in your garden year to year, plant different crops in each square so the nutrients in the soil are spread out and not repeatedly used by the same plant.

An Easy, Beautiful Flower Garden

Perennials are the types of low maintenance flower that brighten up a yard or garden but don't require much attention from gardeners. Unlike annuals, perennials last from year to year instead of needing to be replanted each year. Better Homes & Gardens collected a couple dozen of the best perennials.

Here's a roundup of the easiest, most beautiful of these blooms.

Blanket flower is a drought- and heat-resistant wildflower that produces bright pink and yellow petals in a daisy-like bloom. This flower can grow in poor soil and blooms through the summer and into the fall. It is short-lived.

Russian sage is a tall perennial filled with stalks that produce an abundance of tiny blue flowers. This plant blooms in the late summer and likes the sun; it survives well in drought and heat. More than anything else, Russian sage needs room to grow.

Asters channel daisies as they bloom, with a beautiful sunlike appearance of petals surrounding a bright center. They bloom in late summer and autumn and appear in pink, blue, purple and red, growing as tall as five feet. They can grow in flower beds or the borders of gardens and also look great in a vase inside.

Yarrow is the flower for the first-time gardener or the returning gardener who may not have a green thumb. The flower can thrive in environments throughout the United States and can survive cold, drought and heat. Yarrow pop up as bright, flat-topped clusters in pink, yellow, white and red that last from late spring to early fall.



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Black-eyed Susans bloom from midsummer until the first frost comes, often continuing to show off its golden petals repeatedly throughout the season. The flower is drought-tolerant and grows well in hot, sunny environ-

ments.

Hardy hibiscus, unlike its more delicate tropical cousin, can overwinter as far north as Zone 4 in the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, in which winter temperatures can drop below zero. They can grow to

be several feet tall, with yellow, pink and red flowers the size of plates. They need sun and a rich soil and won't grow in spring until soil temperatures heat up.

Daylilies bloom better in the sun, but they'll still produce

flowers when growing in the shade. They can grow in a variety of soil conditions and are able to survive drought. All daylilies need is a lack of competition; keep grass and weeds away from this yellow-tinted white blooms.

Summer Decor

Winter is over, spring cleaning is done and it's time to redecorate with lighter colors and fabrics, flowers and fruit and all the decorations that make your house feel like summer inside and out. House Beautiful offered a list of fairly inexpensive, do-it-yourself options.

ADD COLOR

Keep fresh flowers in a vase on the table, counter or bookshelf, swap out dark drapes for light- or bright-colored window coverings, add a couple of colorful throw pillows to the couch and exchange your bed coverings and towels for brighter, lighter or patterned versions. Stumped when it comes to color? Visit a local design or paint shop and see what's in style now.

SUMMERIZE YOUR FIREPLACE

Once it's cleaned, you can keep candles, plants, flowers or other summer items in your fireplace, providing decoration during a season when you won't be building fires.

CHANGE UP YOUR FURNITURE

Want to feel like you're on a boat or on the beach? Change up your upholstery, either permanently, through DIY reupholstery, or by adding new throws, pillows and trimmings on the furniture. You can plan colors and patterns with a nautical or tropical or forest theme, helping to bring a little of the outdoors into your living room.

WHITEWASH IT

To immediately bring in a summery feel, paint dark wood or dark walls white or other



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light colors — light blue, green or yellow make a house or a room much brighter. This doesn't have to be entire rooms or even entire walls; look at trim, staircases, doors and other smaller areas.

ADD HANGING PLANTS

Bring your garden inside with hanging plants in the din-

ing and living rooms, patio and other places. Flowers spilling out over the side of a hanging basket provides a different kind of ceiling decoration than a fancy light and makes a room seem brighter and more colorful.

ADD A FIRE PIT

You can build a firepit or buy

a small metal pit for your backyard, which means campfires, s'mores, hot dogs and sitting around the fire for hours, an ever-popular summer activity, right into your space. Adding a picnic table to your backyard, if you have room, helps to bring even more summer fun into your yard. You can find the supplies for these easy projects

at any home improvement store.

INSTALL A MIRROR

Mirrors make rooms look bigger and brighter. You can set one up on a table near a window, giving it lots of light to reflect, and surround it with flowers, plants and other decor.

Stay Cool and on Budget

As the temperatures go up, so do many people's electric bills as air conditioners crank on. While people in some parts of the country will always have to rely on cooling systems, the U.S. Department of Energy recommended a number of steps people can take to minimize how much you have to run the AC.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF COOLER HOURS

If the nights get cooler, turn off your air conditioner and open your windows when the sun goes down and the temperature drops enough to be comfortable. In the morning, shut the windows and blinds to keep the cool air inside. You can also install window coverings that prevent heat from coming in through the windows.

TURN IT UP

Your living room doesn't need to feel like a sweat lodge, but do set the thermostat as high as you can while still being comfortable. When you're away for long periods of time, set the thermostat to a higher temperature. When you return to a hot home, don't set it lower than you normally would; this won't cool your house any faster and likely will cost more. Consider a programmable thermostat to help keep your house temperature reasonable.

USE FANS

Combined with air conditioning, the use of ceiling fans allow you to set your thermostat about 4 degrees higher than you normally would with no noticeable change, because it moves the cool air throughout the house. Use a fan in the



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bathroom during a shower or bath, which will remove the heat and humidity from your home.

KEEP THE OVEN OFF

Cook on the stove or on a grill to avoid heating up your

house with the oven. You can also avoid turning on lights, which add to the ambient temperature, and use the washing machine, dryer and dishwasher only when you have full loads and not during the heat of the day. Even curl-

ing irons, hair dryers, computers and televisions can contribute heat to your home.

GET CHECKED OUT.

Make sure your air conditioner or swamp cooler is running as efficiently as possible

by getting it checked out by a professional. You also can get your home assessed to find cracks, broken seals and other openings that allow hot air in and your cooled air out. Caulk seams and add weatherstripping to block that air flow.

Hosting a Summer Party

Once your house is all fitted out for summer, it's time to invite friends over. Summer is perfect for picnics, brunches and campfires — get-togethers that allow you to eat outside, serve light, fresh foods that don't require lots of cookies and decorate with flowers, colorful patterns or maybe a traditional red- and white-checked tablecloth.

BRUNCH

Brunch combines the best of breakfast and lunch. You can serve sandwiches, quiche, waffles, fruit, coffee, champagne, juice, salads and so many more light foods — try to avoid baking, at least the day of, to keep from heating up the house — and have seating outside to take advantage of the summer weather. MarthaStewart.com recommends using seasonal fruit and fresh-squeezed orange juice and serving foods in bright-colored dishes and vintage-looking wooden spoons. Decorate with fresh flowers or ferns.

PICNIC

Pack a basket and head outdoors! You can do this in a park, at a table, on a blanket or on the beach. You can go traditional with sandwiches, cookies, lemonade and fresh fruit or vegetables, but you can dress up a picnic too. Bring fresh, crusty bread and cheese, add fruit skewers and dip, put together fancy sandwiches and homemade baked goods or bring along cold chicken. Taste of Home recommends bringing a picnic basket and a cooler for cold food and beverages and packing your basket in the reverse order of things you'll need.

To make a day of it, bring croquet, bocce ball, a Frisbee



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or other games. Go at sunset or find a new, out-of-the-way park to enjoy the view, or go to a lake or swimming hole and work up an appetite with a dip.

CAMPFIRE

Invest in foods that can be

cooked on a stick. S'mores and hot dogs are traditional and shouldn't be overlooked, but sausages, vegetables, fruit, chunks of meat and even garlic bread can be speared and cooked over a fire. Put chairs or rocks

around the fire and keep utensils and plates to a minimum, allowing people to eat with their hands and get a little messy. Liven up your s'mores with different types of chocolate or by adding peanut butter to the graham

crackers. If you're less inclined to cook with a stick, make foil dinners with your favorite meat, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots or cauliflower and salt or pepper. Make sure to cook the meat before packing the dinner.