

Time for the vegetable garden

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I am so thrilled that I was able to get some lettuce planted before the recent rain! I did not get my onion sets in but at least I have a start.

When the weather breaks and soils dry out, you can plant all of the cool-season crops. These include lettuce, spinach, radishes, kale, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, peas, potatoes and more.

The key to success in the spring is to WAIT until the soil dries. I know this is sometimes hard to do because you are anxious to get started.

If you have worked hard to improve the structure of your soil by adding compost or other organic matter, don't ruin it by working the soil when it's wet.

This compresses all of the air out of the soil and leads to compaction and frustration.

It's worth the wait – let the soil dry out!

If you like to get started earlier and don't want to play the waiting game, consider raised beds. I was able to plant my lettuce because I have a couple of raised beds just for early planting. I have planted in raised beds in early February before.

Raised beds have the advantage of drying out earlier than the ground soil. They also warm up earlier resulting in quick germination.

I like having the raised beds because I start an early crop of greens now and then plant in the ground when the soil dries, around two weeks later. This way, I have greens coming up over a longer period.

I also use these raised beds for a late summer planting of lettuce. The key to a late planting is that you have to water in order to germinate the plants.

Because raised beds dry out earlier in the spring, they also dry out quicker during the summer. Therefore, if you are using the raised beds during the summer, you may have to water more often.

I typically let my greens in the raised beds, bolt (go to seed) and die out. I pull them, water in August and the seeds from the spring crop begin to germinate for my fall crop.

One side note – it's always been recommended to plant potatoes around St. Patrick's Day. I hold off on planting my potatoes until later in May.

By planting them later in the season, they are not in peak bloom when the Colorado potato beetles are feeding. Colorado potato beetles cause the most damage when potatoes are in full bloom. By planting later, I avoid this problem.

Hold off on planting tomatoes, peppers, sweet corn, squash and the warm season crops until mid-May. These plants don't like the early spring cold soil temperatures and will struggle. Unless of course, you have a raised bed where you can get away with planting them earlier.