

This is the first of what will hopefully be a series of useful tips that improve chances of gardening success. Since I consider myself only a continuing learner of this skill and am prone to amateurish mistakes, I will find myself drawing some expressed opinions from my own experiences. Mostly, though, I will consolidate useful materials on a variety of topics from the Master Gardener Program I have attended and trusted resources offered through it.

Probably the most important lesson I have learned is that it is one thing to construct a venue to eliminate many environmental obstacles when trying to grow your own. It is quite another thing to get out of your own way in actually doing it. So let's start with a topic I'm more familiar with.

### **Timing Crops to Maximize Growing Season**

There are four major controls with respect to aspects of gardening, particularly growing and pest management: biological, physical, chemical and cultural. Let's focus for now on the last of these, the cultural aspects. This refers to the gardening habits formed that you, the gardener can control, specifically, plant timing.

Plant timing is important because it involves many elements seeding, transferring seedlings to the outdoors and when to harvest. Much of this is a factor of climate. As I've learned the hard way many times, some plants will not work by seeding outdoors with a limited growing season where soil temperatures do not reach certain averages for a long enough amount of time. One must be aware of frost dates, both in the spring and fall for their climate zones. Other plants cannot be transferred outdoors for the same reason. Crops such as broccoli will thrive for two growing seasons in the same year if timing is right.

Below is a general guide for planting hardy, semi hardy and tender vegetables in your garden:

#### **Hardy vegetables planted as soon as the ground can be worked in the spring (cold weather crops):**

Broccoli, collards, peas, Brussel sprouts, lettuce, radishes, cabbage, kale, celery, mustard, Chinese cabbage, spinach,  
Turnips, onions

#### **Semi hardy vegetables planted near the average date of the last frost:**

Beets, endive, potatoes, carrots, cauliflower, parsnips, Swiss chard

#### **Tender vegetables planted after all danger of frost (warm weather crops):**

Snap beans, eggplant, watermelon, lima beans, sweet corn, cucumbers, summer squash, tomatoes, honey dew, winter squash, cantaloupe, sweet potato, chile, okra, pumpkin, peanuts,

bell pepper, black-eyed peas

**Hardy and Semihardy Vegetables planted in summer for the fall garden:**

Broccoli, turnips, garlic, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, kohlrabi, kale, spinach, lettuce, radish, cabbage

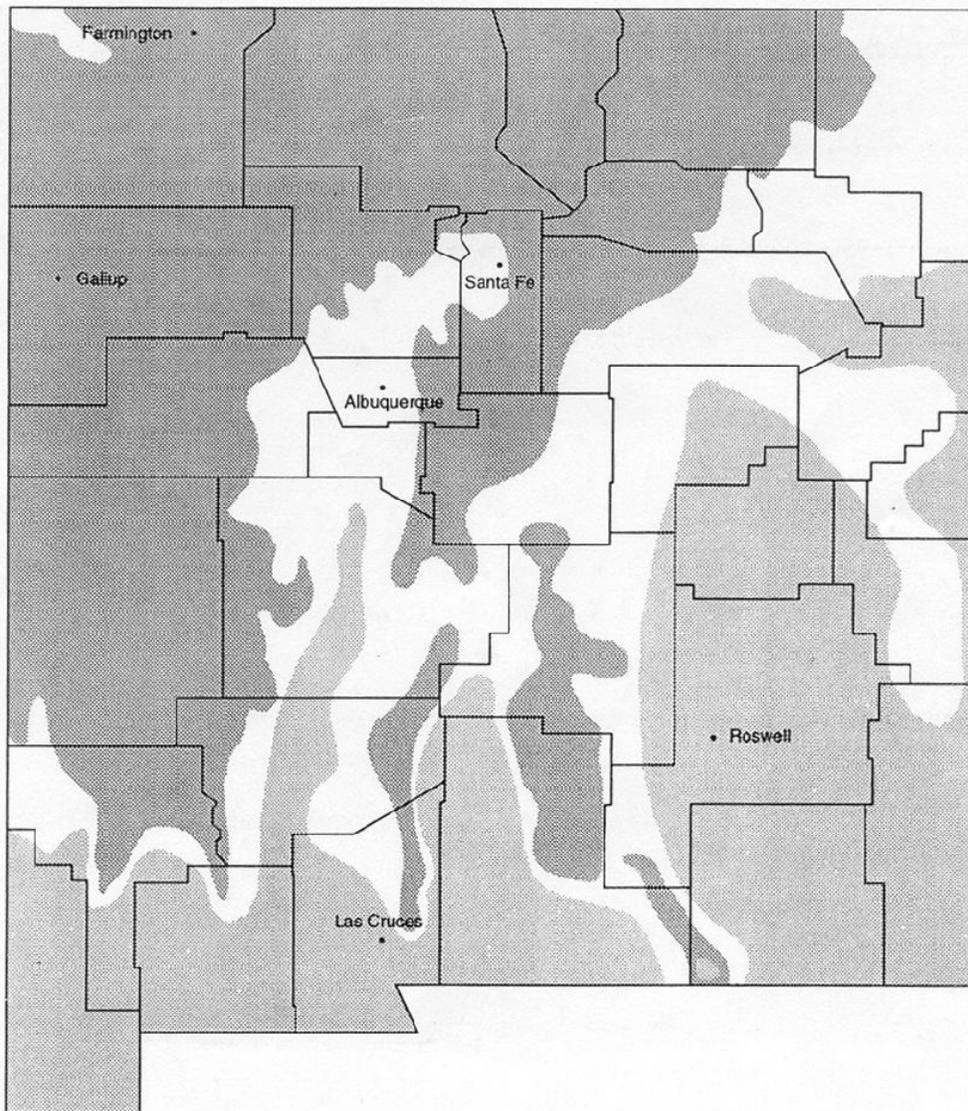
The Master Gardener program is prevalent throughout the U.S. Manuals publish dates for seeding and transplanting varieties of crops based on climate data. NM State University furnishes this information, revised by Dr. Stephanie Walker in the link below. It has helped me enormously.

[http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/\\_circulars/CR457B.pdf](http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_circulars/CR457B.pdf)

Your State Ag Ext. Agency or Land Grant University should have this information available as well.

**Very important: Keep an annual log of what you did and when; refer to it each year for patterns of weather, what worked and what did not.** As I check my own log, I notice that I have been seeding broccoli indoors right around February and transplanting later towards the beginning of April. However, the transplants have not made it because they have been too spindly probably because of lack of sufficient light. Going forward I will direct sow outdoors earlier in the season. Tomatoes are another case. I learned early on that seeding indoors are the way to go because the growing season in my area is not long enough to harvest from seed. The head start helps extend the tomato growing season.

**Also note: Soils gain more nutrients, like nitrogen, phosphorous and phosphate, by rotating crops- not growing the same things in the same places year after year. Some crops like more shade than others. The same garden can have several microclimates. Notice what tends to thrive in certain places when doing the layout for a season.**



Average number of frost free days	Average date of last frost
Greater than or equal to 180	Area 1, April 1-20
Less than 180 but greater than or equal to 150	Area 2, April 20 - May 10
Less than 150	Area 3, May 10 - June 1

Above is a map of NM with different climate zones and what to expect in terms of number of frost days. Refer to your seed packet for number of growing days that are recommended and time accordingly.

It is equally important to know when to harvest. There are signs that plants give the grower to signal when the time is right. When cucumbers begin to yellow on the outside, it usually results in a bitter taste. When some roots like radishes are in the ground too long, they become woody and not as sweet

as they could be.



