

Spring Planting Guide

Start small,
Grow TALL



Let's Grow
 Home

Wondering What to Plant This Spring?

Spring is the ideal time to begin your garden! With the days getting longer, the weather warming, and the soil full of life, it's the start of a fresh growing season. In this section, we'll cover how to pick crops you'll really enjoy eating, a table of spring crops, quick planting tips, and the basics of growing common vegetables.

1. Choose What You Actually Eat

The most successful beginner gardens are the ones that focus on what you'll actually eat:

Go into your kitchen and write down all of the fruit, vegetables and herbs your family regularly eats – like potatoes, broccoli, rosemary, oranges, apples, etc.

Break the list down into what can be grown in the spring season, and you'll have the perfect starting point for your first garden (see table below of some spring crops).

Grow simple herbs such as basil, parsley, rosemary, and thyme for fresh use and have the garden close to your kitchen (that way you will actually use them).

Add staples like potatoes, kūmara, and pumpkin as they are easy to grow, fill out meals, and store well.

Include a flower like marigold or borage to support bees, butterflies, and other helpful insects. This means your crops will get pollinated which means your plants will bear more fruit and vegetables.

Tip: Start your first garden small and keep it close to the kitchen. A smaller space is easier to manage and helps you avoid feeling overwhelmed, while having it nearby makes it more likely you will use your fresh harvests. Remember: if it is out of sight, it is easy to forget, but when it is right in view it stays top of mind and you will naturally check on it more often.

Spring Crops for Beginners

Below you'll find beginner-friendly spring crops with how-to notes. The table includes plant type, planting tips, days to harvest, spacing, and useful companions so you can plan confidently and avoid common mistakes. These crops have been specifically chosen for their reliability and ease of growing in New Zealand's spring conditions. They're forgiving of beginner mistakes, grow relatively quickly to keep you motivated, and provide practical harvests that will actually make it to your dinner table. Most can be direct-sown (planted straight into the garden) or started as seedlings from your local garden center.

PLANT	TYPE	PLANTING TIPS	DAYS TO HARVEST	SPACING	COMPANION PLANTS/TIPS
Potato	Root	Plant seed potatoes in well-drained soil, mound soil as they grow	90–120	30–40cm apart	Beans, corn, cabbage, marigolds (repel pests)
Kūmara	Root	Plant slips in warm soil, full sun, space well apart	100–120	30–50cm apart	Corn (shade & support), beans (fix nitrogen)
Spinach	Leaf	Sow every 2–3 weeks for continuous harvest	30–40	15–20cm apart	Strawberries, onions, peas (space-efficient, pest control)
Spring Onions	Bulb	Sow shallowly or transplant seedlings	50–60	10–15cm apart	Carrots, lettuce, spinach (repels some pests)
Zucchini	Fruit	Needs space, plant after frost, full sun	50–70	80–100cm apart	Nasturtiums (repel aphids), corn (partial shade & structure)
Tomato	Fruit	Start from seedlings, plant in full sun	60–90	50–60cm apart	Basil (improves flavour & growth, deters pests), marigold (pest deterrent)
Corn	Grain/Vegetable	Sow in blocks for pollination, full sun	70–90	25–30cm apart	Beans (fix nitrogen), squash (ground cover) – classic “Three Sisters”
Pumpkin	Fruit	Needs lots of space, sow after frost	90–120	100–120cm apart	Corn & beans (Three Sisters), nasturtiums (repel pests)
Strawberry	Fruit	Plant dormant runners or seedlings	60–90	25–30cm apart	Spinach, lettuce, borage (attract pollinators)
Chilli	Fruit	Start from seedlings, warm soil, full sun	70–90	40–50cm apart	Basil (repels aphids), marigold (pest deterrent)

Quick Planting Tips:

- Seeds should be planted at a depth no more than twice their size (if the soil is too wet, the seed will rot; too dry and they won't germinate).
- Store bought seedlings should have their roots gently loosened before planting and be pressed lightly into the soil to remove air pockets.
- Water gently after planting – for higher success, you can add seaweed fertilizer.
- Label plants so you know what's growing where (trust me, you will forget otherwise).
- Warm-season crops like tomato, corn, pumpkin, zucchini, strawberry, chilli, and kūmara should be planted after the last frost (usually late October in the Bay of Plenty).

First Garden Success Formula

Your first spring garden doesn't need to be complicated to be successful. Focus on these proven principles:

Start Small: A 2m x 2m plot or even containers on a deck can provide plenty of fresh produce for a family.

Choose Easy Wins: Lettuce, radishes, and herbs are nearly foolproof and give you confidence to expand.

Stay Close: Keep your garden within sight of your kitchen window or back door.

Quality Soil: Good compost or quality potting mix is worth the investment – it's the foundation of everything.

Consistent Water: A simple watering routine beats sporadic heavy watering every time.

Learn as You Grow: Every season teaches you something new about your specific conditions.

Companion Planting Tips for Beginners:

- **Tomato + Basil:** Basil can improve tomato growth and flavour and help deter pests.
- **Potatoes + Marigolds:** Marigolds help repel nematodes and some potato pests.
- **Corn + Beans + Pumpkin:** The classic "Three Sisters" combination: corn provides structure, beans fix nitrogen, and pumpkin shades soil to retain moisture.
- **Zucchini + Nasturtiums:** Nasturtiums attract aphids away from zucchini.
- **Spinach & Onions:** Plant together to make the most of space and help deter pests.

KID-FRIENDLY QUICK GREENS & LUNCHBOX IDEAS

Fast, mild greens keep tamariki engaged and make it easy to add homegrown goodness to lunches. These crops grow quickly, taste great when picked young, and fit naturally into family meals.

Rocket (arugula)

Gentle peppery kick when picked young → expands taste range without being "spicy."

Contains vitamin K and plant compounds that add flavour without sauces.

Fast to mature (wins patience battles); great for taste-test games (mix 50/50 with lettuce).

Lunchbox: cheese + rocket pinwheels; mix into salads for a tiny zing.

Asian greens (mizuna / tatsoi / pak choi – baby leaf)

Soft texture, mild flavour → easy add to noodles or rice.

Provide vitamins A, C, K; tatsoi is notably tender for small mouths.

Quick regrowth keeps the "we grew this!" momentum going.

Lunchbox: chopped into cold noodle pots with sesame drizzle.

Spinach (baby)

Small leaves = mild compared to mature spinach.

Offers folate, vitamin K, and iron (non-heme) – nice variety in a week's greens.

Season lesson: grows best cool; swap to NZ spinach in heat (great teachable moment).

Lunchbox: mini frittata muffins; blend into pesto for a stealthy nutrient bump.

Pea shoots

Sweet, pea-like flavour kids actually enjoy.

Very fast (10–16 days) → instant gratification.

Contains vitamin C, A, and a little protein for a leafy green.

Indoor tray = year-round science project (light, water, growth tracking).

Lunchbox: pea-shoot pesto or simple snips in wraps.

Allergy note: peas are legumes – skip if there's a pea/legume allergy.

Microgreens (sunflower, radish, broccoli, coriander, etc.)

7–12 days to harvest keeps tamariki engaged.

Big flavour in tiny leaves; sprinkle amounts still "count."

Many varieties provide vitamins A/C/K and diverse phytonutrients (varies by seed).

Windowsill-friendly – no garden needed; great for daily "spritz & measure" routines.

Lunchbox: on cream-cheese bagels, sushi bowls, salads.

✓ Now that you've chosen what to grow, let's make sure your garden space is ready. Up next: **Preparing Your Garden** – a simple guide to setting up the perfect spot for a healthy garden.



Preparing Your Garden

Getting your garden space ready is the foundation for a healthy, productive spring garden. A little planning and preparation now saves time and frustration later.

1. Choosing the Right Spot

- **Sunlight:** Most veggies and herbs need 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight daily. North-facing spots in NZ are best.
- **Shelter:** Pick a space sheltered from strong winds but with good airflow.
- **Access to Water:** Being near a tap or water source makes life much easier.
- **Raised bed, or planting in the ground?** See 3. for information.

2. Preparing the Soil

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"We aren't what we eat, we are what we eat, eats"

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- **Clear the Area:** Remove weeds, grass, & old plants.
- **Loosen the Soil:** Use a garden fork to break up compacted soil (Loosen, don't turn)
- **Add Organic Matter:** Mix in compost, worm castings, or well-rotted manure for nutrients.
- **Check Drainage:** If water pools after rain, raise the bed or add organic matter to improve drainage.

3. Raised Beds or In-Ground?

Each option has pros and cons. Choose what suits your space, time, and budget.

Raised Beds

- Great for good drainage and easy access
- Warm up faster in spring
- Good option if you're restricted by mobility
- Initial setup cost but lasts years

In-Ground Beds

- Cheapest option - use what you have
- Great for larger gardens or root crops
- Regenerates the soil biology and offers more nutrient density
- Allows you to use all areas of your garden for growing

4. Extra Tips Before Planting

- Test soil pH if possible (most veggies prefer a neutral 7.0pH)
- Mulch paths and edges to reduce weeds and less birds digging
- Plan crop rotation (don't plant the same family in the same spot year after year)
- Sketch a rough garden layout (spacing diagram helps!)

Soil Health Basics

Nutritious produce begins with healthy, living soil.

Soil Biology 101

"We aren't what we eat, we are what we eat eats." Feed soil life first and plants will follow. Compost and organic matter fuel beneficial microbes; in turn, microbes convert that into plant-available nutrients. Earthworms aerate and mix, fungal networks move water and minerals, and good structure holds moisture while still draining.

- **Loosen, don't turn:** Preserve soil layers and the communities living there.
- **Aeration & drainage:** Compacted soil suffocates roots and can cause rot – improve structure with compost and avoid overworking wet soil.
- **Mulch:** Protects biology, moderates temperature, and reduces evaporation.

1. Encourage Soil Life

- **Organic Matter is Key:** Add compost, worm castings, or well-rotted manure before planting.
- **Soil Life:** Beneficial fungi, bacteria, and insects break down organic matter into nutrients plants can actually use.
- **Structure:** A healthy soil is crumbly, holds moisture, but also drains well.
- **Avoid using chemical fertilisers & sprays:** They destroy soil life.
- **Diversity is key:** Biological diversity above the ground encourages biological diversity below the ground – creating more nutrients for the plants to absorb.

2. Composting Made Simple

Compost is your garden's best food.

- **Balance:** Aim for a mix of "greens" (food scraps, grass clippings) and "browns" (leaves, straw, cardboard).
- **Moisture:** Keep it damp, like a wrung-out sponge.
- **Airflow:** Turn your compost every few weeks to add oxygen.
- **Result:** In 2-3 months you'll have dark, sweet-smelling compost to add back into your garden.

3. Natural Soil Boosters

- **Seaweed (liquid or dried):** Adds trace minerals and boosts plant immunity.
- **Lime:** Replenishes minerals & balances pH.
- **Comfrey or Nettle Tea:** Natural liquid fertilizer for strong leafy growth.
- **Mulch:** A layer of straw, leaves, or wood chips helps keep soil cool, moist, and full of life.

4. Encourage Beneficial Microbes

- **Mulch & Cover Crops:** Protect soil from drying out and erosion, and keep feeding microbes year-round.
- **Worm Farms:** A small worm bin provides steady "worm tea" for your garden.

5. Quick Health Check

- Soil is dark and crumbly, not pale or compacted
- 🪱 Earthworms are present (a good sign of life!)
- Holds moisture but doesn't stay soggy
- Plants look strong without heavy fertiliser use

✔ With living soil beneath your feet, you're ready for the next step: 🌱 **Seasonal Planting**, where we'll match your crops to the right conditions for Bay of Plenty's spring season.

Seasonal Planting

Getting the timing right makes all the difference in your garden. Some crops thrive when the soil is warm, while others can be planted earlier in cooler conditions. This page will guide you through sowing, transplanting, and caring for your spring crops.

1. Sowing Seeds vs. Seedlings

Practical planting starts with choosing whether to sow directly or transplant seedlings. Direct sowing suits quick-sprouting, hardy crops and saves time; seedlings let you get a head start on warmth-loving plants and ensure strong starts before outdoor conditions are right.

- **Direct Sow (into soil):** Corn, pumpkin, zucchini, beans, carrots, potatoes, kūmara.
- **Raise Seedlings (indoors or in trays):** Tomatoes, chillies, capsicum, basil, lettuces.
- **Transplanting:** Move seedlings into the garden once the last frost has passed and the soil is warm.

2. Spacing & Depth Basics

Good spacing and correct depth set your plants up for success. Crowding stresses plants and invites pests; correct depth helps seeds germinate reliably and roots establish well.

- **Small seeds** (carrots, spinach, spring onion) → shallow sowing (0.5–1cm).
- **Larger seeds** (corn, pumpkin, beans) → deeper sowing (2–5cm).
- Follow the spacing guide (see previous page), giving each plant enough room to breathe.

Why planting depth matters

- Too deep and seeds struggle to reach light before energy is spent; too shallow and they dry out or wash away.
- Moist, warm soil is key – if soil is waterlogged seeds rot; if too dry they won't germinate.

3. Watering Tips

Water deeply and consistently to build resilient plants. Aim to water the soil, not the leaves, and use mulch to lock in moisture and suppress weeds.

- Water seedlings gently so you don't wash them away.
- Morning watering is best – plants drink during the day.
- Deep, less frequent watering is better than shallow daily sprinkles.
- Mulch helps keep soil moist and reduces weeds.

Adjusting for Late Frosts & Microclimates

- **Delay warm-season transplants** (tomatoes, chillies, pumpkin) if nights are still cold or frost is possible.
- **Use microclimates:** Sunny walls, patios, and raised beds warm faster; low, shaded spots stay cooler longer.
- **Protect young plants** with cloches, fleece, or temporary covers during unexpected cold snaps.

Signs of Readiness (Transplanting)

- Seedlings have 2–3 true leaves and look sturdy.
- Soil is consistently warm and workable; no frost forecast.
- Seedlings are *hardened off*: gradually acclimated outdoors over 7–10 days.

4. Seasonal Planting Guide – Bay of Plenty (Spring)

CROP	START INDOORS (SEEDLINGS)	DIRECT SOW OUTDOORS	PLANT OUT (SEEDLINGS)	NOTES
Tomato	Aug-Sep	—	Oct-Nov	Loves warmth, stake plants
Chilli	Aug-Sep	—	Nov	Needs long season & heat
Zucchini	—	Oct-Nov	Oct-Nov	Fast grower, plenty of space
Corn	—	Oct-Dec	—	Plant in blocks for pollination
Pumpkin	—	Oct-Nov	—	Give lots of room
Potato	—	Sep-Nov	—	Plant seed potatoes, mound soil
Kumara	—	—	Nov-Dec	Plant slips in warm soil
Spinach	—	Sep-Nov	—	Sow every 2-3 weeks
Spring Onion	—	Sep-Nov	—	Great interplant crop
Strawberry	—	—	Aug-Oct	Plant runners/seedlings

5. Timing Tips

- **Don't rush** - warm-loving plants like tomatoes, chillies, and pumpkins will sulk in cold soil.
- **Succession planting** (sowing every 2-3 weeks) keeps your garden producing continuously.
- **Mix crops:** pair fast-growers (spinach, spring onion) with slower crops (corn, tomatoes) to maximize space.

➤ Next up: 🌸 **Companion Planting & Pollinators** — discover how to make your garden healthier and more productive by planting friends together.

Looking Ahead: Multi-Season Planning

Plan beyond spring to keep harvests coming and your soil improving over time.

Crop Rotation & Bed Mapping

- Rotate plant families (e.g., brassicas, legumes, roots, fruiting) to reduce disease and balance nutrients.
- Note where each crop grows this season and plan a new spot next season.

Soil Regeneration

- Use cover crops or green manures in off-periods; add compost and mulch between crops.
- Aim for continuous cover – living roots feed microbes year-round.

Seasonal Checklist

- **Summer:** Deep watering, mulch top-ups, pest scouting, harvest often.
- **Autumn:** Clear spent crops, add compost, plan cool-season sowings or seed saving.



Pollinator Plants

1. Why Do Pollinators Matter?

- **Bees** carry pollen between flowers, helping crops like tomatoes, pumpkins, strawberries, and zucchini bear fruit.
- **Butterflies & moths** bring beauty while aiding pollination.
- **Ladybugs** feast on aphids and soft-bodied pests.
- **Hoverflies & lacewings** control pests like whitefly and caterpillars.

2. Best Plants to Attract Beneficial Insects

- **For Bees & Butterflies:** Lavender, borage (bee magnet), sunflowers, nasturtium, echinacea, calendula, Pineapple sage (winter blooms).
- **For Ladybugs & Lacewings:** Dill, fennel, coriander, yarrow, alyssum (attracts hoverflies), cosmos.
- **Dual Benefits (flowers + edible/medicinal use):** Basil, thyme, oregano, chamomile.

Why these help

- **Borage** brings pollinators to fruiting crops like tomatoes and squash.
- **Alyssum** attracts hoverflies whose larvae feed on aphids.
- **Marigolds** can help reduce pest pressure near potatoes and tomatoes.
- **Basil** pairs with tomatoes — supports growth and draws bees to blossoms.

3. Planting Strategies

Blend flowers and herbs throughout your beds to attract pollinators and beneficial insects all year. This creates a balanced ecosystem that reduces pests and boosts harvests.

- 🌻 **Mix flowers with crops** - plant marigolds near tomatoes or basil near chillies.
- 🌸 **Winter bloomers matter** - plants like Pineapple sage flower in winter, giving bees enough nectar to survive the cold season.
- 🌻 **Layer your garden** - tall sunflowers, mid-height herbs, and low-growing alyssum create habitats for different insects.
- 🚫 **Avoid chemical sprays** - pesticides harm pollinators and disrupt natural balance.

4. Companion Pollinator Boosters

- **Tomato + Basil** - improves growth, keeps away pests, attracts bees.
- **Corn + Sunflowers** - draw in bees for better pollination.
- **Cucumber + Nasturtium** - nasturtium lures aphids away, flowers attract pollinators.
- **Pumpkin + Borage** - borage flowers attract bees that love pumpkin blossoms.

5. Quick Tip for Balance

A simple rule: For every 3–4 vegetable crops, add at least 1–2 flowering plants. This creates balance, beauty, and natural pest control.

➤ Next up: 🌙 Lunar Planting guide



Simple Moon Planting Guide

For centuries, gardeners and farmers have followed the rhythms of the moon to guide planting and harvesting. The moon's gravitational pull affects tides, water, and even the moisture in soil - meaning plants respond to these cycles too. Planting by the moon can help your garden grow stronger and more naturally balanced.

1. Why Plant with the Moon?

- 🌑 The moon influences soil moisture – just like tides, it gently pulls water upward in the soil profile.
- 🌱 Seeds absorb more water during certain phases, leading to stronger germination.
- 📅 Following lunar cycles creates a simple rhythm for planting, pruning, and harvesting.

2. The Four Moon Phases & Gardening Tips



New Moon (Waxing Crescent)

- Energy is rising, moisture is pulled upwards.
- Best for leafy greens & above-ground crops (spinach, lettuce, herbs, cabbage).
- Sow seeds that sprout quickly.



First Quarter (Waxing Half Moon)

- Growth and strength increase.
- Best for fruiting & vining crops (tomatoes, beans, corn, zucchini, pumpkin).
- Transplant seedlings now for a strong establishment.



Full Moon (Waning Gibbous)

- Moonlight is strongest, moisture is high.
- Best for root crops (carrots, potatoes, kūmara, beetroot).
- Also a great time for fertilising, pruning, and harvesting.



Last Quarter (Waning Half Moon)

- Energy draws downward into roots.
- Best for maintenance: weeding, mulching, composting, pest control.
- Avoid planting now; focus on soil work.

3. A Simple Lunar Planting Routine

- **New Moon** – Sow leafy greens (spinach, lettuce, herbs) as rising moisture supports quick germination.
- **First Quarter** – Plant/transplant fruiting crops (tomatoes, beans, corn, zucchini) for strong top growth.
- **Full Moon** – Direct-sow or plant root crops (carrots, potatoes, kūmara, beetroot) when soil moisture peaks.
- **Last Quarter** – Pause planting; weed, mulch, feed, and tidy beds to prepare for the next cycle.

4. Quick Tips

- 📅 Keep a simple calendar and mark the moon phases.
- 📖 Even if you miss a phase, don't stress - use it as a guide, not a rulebook.
- 🌙 Combine lunar planting with seasonal timing (e.g., don't sow corn in winter just because it's the right moon phase).

👉 Next up: **Example Garden Plan & Templates** – see how to put it all together in a beginner-friendly layout.



Example Garden Plan & Printable Templates



















































Below are example garden layouts showing proper plant spacing. Each plant needs different space – for example, zucchini requires 60–80cm while beans need just 15cm. Download our printable 30cm grid template to plan your own garden.

Example Garden Layout with Proper Spacing

🌱 Garden Planting Chart

Fence (10 ft away)

N ↑ E → S ↓ W ←

Plants	Col 1	Eggplants (seedlings)			
Peas & Companions + Chilis x2	 (x4)				
	 (x4)				Sunflower
	 (x4)				Zucchini
	 (x4)				Borage
Tomatoes					Beefsteak tomatoes
Jalapeño					Cherry tomatoes
Pasilla					
Anaheim			 (x4)	 (x4)	Basil
Thai Hot			 (x4)	 (x4)	
Daikon	 (x16)	 (x16)			Lav
Parsnips	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	Carrots
	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	
	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	 (x16)	
Cavendish		Eversweet			

(x#) = Plant count  = Peas  = Eggplants  = Tomatoes  = Jalapeño  = Zucchini  = Basil

 = Strawberries

Troubleshooting & FAQs

Quick answers for sprouting, light, frost, pests, and more.

Why are my seeds not sprouting?

- **Depth:** Plant no deeper than twice seed size.
- **Moisture:** Too wet → rot; too dry → no germination.
- **Temperature:** Cold soil slows or prevents sprouting – wait for consistent warmth.
- **Seed quality:** Old or poorly stored seed may have low viability.

Why are my seedlings leggy or yellow?

- **Light:** Not enough light leads to long, weak stems – provide brighter light.
- **Cold or shock:** Chilly nights or sudden changes can stress plants.
- **Fertility:** Use gentle, balanced feeding; avoid over-fertilising young plants.

What if frost hits my seedlings?

- Remove damaged tissue, replant if needed, and protect future plantings with fleece or cloches.
- Delay planting tender crops until frost risk passes and soil is warm.

What if pests destroy new growth?

- **Companions & flowers:** Attract beneficial insects (borage, alyssum, dill).
- **Barriers:** Use nets, collars, or row covers to protect seedlings.
- **Soil health:** Healthy, living soil supports resilient plants.