

Jobs for February

When can I sow my seeds?

February can be a tricky month in the vegetable gardening calendar.

In past years we've often had a few beautiful, sunny days that have tempted us into the garden. The soil has warmed up and become less sticky and so with great enthusiasm we may have planted some of the new seeds that have arrived in the post or we've picked up from the garden centre. Fantastic. Job done – we can relax for a few weeks! BIG MISTAKE! Three weeks later it's snowed heavily and all our little seeds have been lost. February is still considered to be Late Winter (although it can be hard to put a name to our seasons the way our climate is changing) so we have to be cautious with our sowing.



Sometimes one of the hardest things to learn about vegetable gardening can be patience.

Most seeds will not germinate outside until the soil has reached a temperature of about 7°C (45°F) for at least three consecutive days.



It is possible to start crops off a little earlier but this may seem daunting to new gardeners. It's worth trying out though if you have the time and like the idea of having earlier crops than your friends and neighbours! It's also a great way to extend the growing season.

Covering the ground with clear or black plastic will help to warm it up quicker. The plastic can be laid directly onto the soil about three weeks before you plan to sow your seeds and weighed down to prevent it blowing away. When you're ready to sow, remove the plastic and sow directly into the prepared soil. The plastic can then be used to make a cloche (see TIPS below) to protect the seedlings from cold snaps.



Vegetables that can be started off this way include broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kale, lettuce, peas, onions, radish and spinach.

For more detailed information that can help you work out the best sowing dates for your area take a look at the following blog post: [How do you know when it's safe to sow?](#)

Your soil type will also determine how early you can start planting out – clay soils take longer to warm up than others. Once they have however, they are very nutritious and your crops should thrive. Sandy or light soils will warm up quickly, making early planting much

easier but they are likely to dry out and become less productive later. The soil often warms up much faster in raised beds too. ([How to determine soil type tips here.](#))

If you didn't have a chance to dig over your soil in the autumn months it's not too late, and in fact spring is the best time for preparing sandy soils.

However, avoid digging if the soil is too wet and sticky or frozen as the structure of the soil can be damaged.

Although double digging is the recommended way of starting off vegetable beds (see [Glossary](#) for explanation) sometimes time (or fitness!) may prevent us doing this. So dig over the soil to a depth of about 37.5 – 45cm (15 – 18in) or about a spit (the depth of a spade) and incorporate organic matter ([see Glossary](#)) as you go. If you have a large area to prepare, divide it into smaller sections – it won't seem as daunting and you're less likely to cause yourself an injury!

When possible you should aim to leave the soil for about six weeks before planting or sowing which will allow it to settle.

Keep A Diary

If you keep a Vegetable Diary it can be a great help when you're planning crops in the future. Include the weather conditions and temperatures as well as the dates you started propagating, sowing or planting crops and the varieties chosen. It's surprising how quickly you can forget and the notes you make this year will help you with your planning next year.



Planting & Sowing

From mid-February onwards greenhouse-grown tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers can be sown in a heated propagator or a warm room, ready for potting on and growing undercover.

Seed potatoes are available now in garden centres. If you're trying to avoid using chemicals in your choose **blight resistant varieties**. [There's a blog post here which includes a table you can download and take with you to garden centres.](#)



If you're chitting them (see Glossary) it usually takes about four to six weeks for them to produce buds. They can then be planted out as soon as the soil is workable, usually at some

time during March and April. [For more information on growing and choosing potatoes, take a look at the blog post here.](#)

Garlic and shallots can be planted out in light soils – it will still be too cold for heavier soils. [There's a post here on sowing autumn grown garlic.](#) The method is the same for spring garlic but ensure the packet of bulbs you buy from your garden centre mentions “Spring”.

Likewise, [there's a post here for planting overwintering onion bulbs.](#)

If you're eager to get things growing and you have the space, towards the end of the month seeds can be planted in pots or modules under cover of broad beans, early beetroot, spinach, summer cabbage and lettuce. Peas can be sown in old, clean guttering undercover ready to plant out. Companion plants can be sown into modules now too – Marigolds, Nasturtiums & Sweet Peas can all be started off undercover.