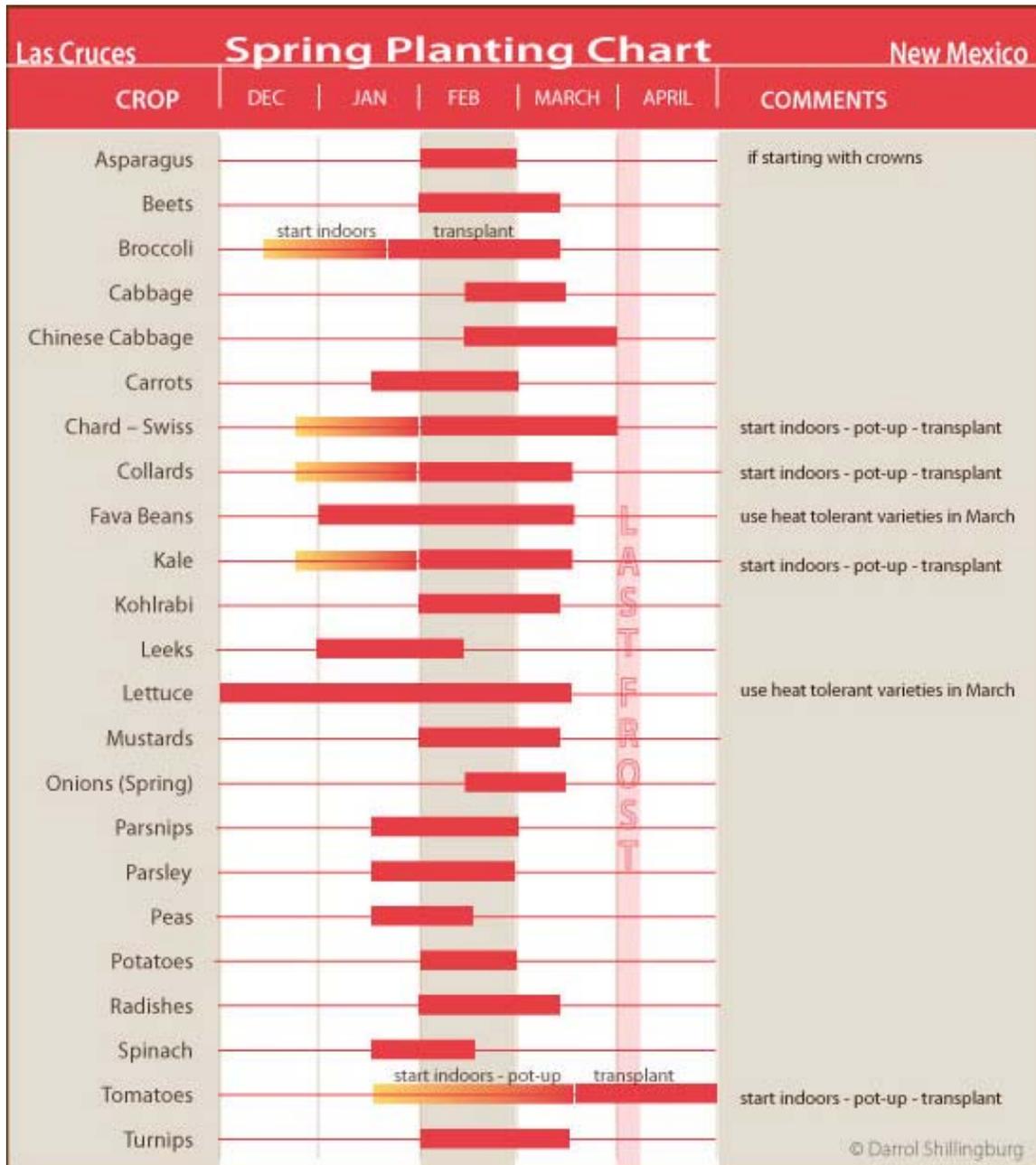


Twenty-Three Food Plants to Start in February

Darrol Shillingburg – Master Gardener

I can tell its planting time by counting the catalogs in the mailbox, and it is that time of year again. So, I made up a spring planting chart just for southern New Mexico and have already found it useful.



In General:

Starting plants early can be both beneficial and detrimental. Starting cold hardy plants in six packs and pots can provide a jump on the spring season if you provide enough light and root space to grow strong seedlings. Here is where timing is critical. Plan on either transplanting starts into the garden at four to five weeks old or potting them up into larger containers.

Some plants should be started directly in the garden. That obviously includes the root crops, but it is also advisable to direct sow mustard, kohlrabi as well as fava beans and peas.

Winter soil temperatures can be too cold for good germination, so having a soil thermometer is important. Hold off on sowing direct until soil temperatures are above 40° F, although peas will eventually germinate at colder temperatures – if they don't rot in the meantime. Pre-sprouting seeds can reduce germination risk, particularly for peas and fava beans and get plants growing a week earlier. You can warm up the soil by covering it with plastic sheeting before sowing seed, which also helps.

Broccoli:

Growing spring broccoli here is tricky. For success, you need nighttime temperatures to stay about 40° F and daytime temperatures to stay below 70-75° F. Broccoli plants that are one month old and subjected to temperatures below 40F will bolt even though they are not mature enough to produce a decent sized head. Fortunately, the entire plant is edible, so only the head is lost. If you don't enjoy the uncertainty, wait until late summer to plant broccoli – same advice for kohlrabi.

Lettuce:

If you plant lettuce in late March, use heat tolerant varieties – just in case we have hot days in April and May. Try the varieties - Jericho, Red Sails, Nevada and Matchless.

Potatoes:

If you are planting in February, use only early varieties and wait a while before starting the mid and late season ones. Chitting (pre-germinating) the starts will reduce the risk of rot and insect predation.

Radishes:

Optimum temperatures for spring radishes – soil 45° F+ - Air 60-70° F

Tomatoes:

The only warm season crop that I start this early in the year – you can start them later and even plant in summer for a fall crop – but those first tomatoes are so seductive. Tomato starts grow best if they get full sun during the day and are indoors (or kept warm) at night. I have had excellent early production from the variety - Oregon Spring Bush.

If you haven't started planting for your spring food garden, now is the time. With the exception of broccoli and kohlrabi, all of the plants on the chart are easy to grow in spring. The key to success is getting them started on time.

Good Gardening and Good Eating

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Doña Ana Extension Master Gardener

Additional Resources:

[Growing Zones in New Mexico and Varieties](#) (circ 457B)

[Plant Varieties for New Mexico Home Gardens](#) (circ 457)

[Home Food Gardening Publications](#) (List of Extension Pubs)

[Eighty-Two Food Garden Varieties of Las Cruces](#)

Broccoli:

[Broccoli Bits](#)

Potatoes:

[Greening The Spuds](#)

Radishes:

[Radishes Gone Wild](#)

Tomatoes:

[A Tomato In Winter](#)

[Blemishes On The Road To Ripe and Juicy](#)