GrowSmart

Succession Planting Starter Guide

Sowing formulas, best crops to stagger, what NOT to succession plant, and sample schedules for Zone 5b and Zone 7a.

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The Feast-or-Famine Problem

Plant 30 lettuce seeds on May 1 and they all mature at once. You get two weeks of more lettuce than you can eat, then nothing for the rest of the season. Succession planting fixes this by spreading your sowings across the season so you always have something at the right stage.

This is how market gardeners harvest consistently for months — and you can do it in a backyard raised bed just as easily.

> GrowSmart Tip: GrowSmart auto-generates succession planting schedules based on each crop's days to maturity and your city's specific growing season length — not a zone average.

The Succession Planting Formula

Number of Sowings = (Growing Season Weeks − (DTM ÷ 7)) ÷ Interval

Zone 5b Example: Lettuce

Growing season: ~22 weeks (May 6 – Oct 5) | Lettuce DTM: 45 days (6.4 weeks) | Sowing interval: every 2 weeks

Sowings = (22 − 6.4) ÷ 2 = ~7–8 sowings across the season

Zone 7a Example: Lettuce

Growing season: ~28 weeks (Apr 15 – Oct 25) | Lettuce DTM: 45 days (6.4 weeks) | Sowing interval: every 2 weeks

Sowings = (28 − 6.4) ÷ 2 = ~10–11 sowings across the season. That's 3 more harvests from the same crop, just by being in a warmer zone.

Best Crops for Succession Planting

Fast-maturing crops with short days-to-maturity benefit most from staggered sowings.

Crop	DTM	Sow Every	Sowings (Zone 5b)	Sowings (Zone 7a)
Lettuce	45–55 days	2 weeks	7–8	10–11
Radish	22–30 days	10 days	12–15	18–20
Spinach	38–50 days	2–3 weeks	5–7	7–9
Arugula	30–40 days	2 weeks	7–8	10–11
Cilantro	45–60 days	3 weeks	4–5	6–7
Bush Beans	50–60 days	2–3 weeks	3–4	5–6

Crop	DTM	Sow Every	Sowings (Zone 5b)	Sowings (Zone 7a)
Beets	50–70 days	3 weeks	3–4	4–5
Carrots	60–80 days	3 weeks	3	4–5
Peas	55–70 days	2–3 weeks	2–3	3–4
Green Onion	60–70 days	3 weeks	3–4	4–5

What NOT to Succession Plant

Not every crop benefits from staggered sowing. Some produce continuously from a single planting, have extremely long maturity times, or only perform well with one seasonal sow.

Crop	Reason
Tomatoes	Long DTM; single planting produces all season from one plant
Peppers	Same as tomatoes — continuous producer once established
Zucchini / Squash	One plant produces heavily all season; more plants = waste
Potatoes	Long season crop; planted once for fall harvest
Garlic	Fall-planted; single harvest the following summer
Winter Squash	90–120 day crop; only one planting fits most zones
Corn	Requires block planting for pollination; one sow preferred

Sample Zone 5b Schedule

Last frost May 6, first frost Oct 5 — a 152-day growing season.

Sow Date	Lettuce	Radish	Spinach	Beans
Apr 22	Sow #1	—	Sow #1	—
May 6	Sow #2	Sow #1	—	—
May 16	—	Sow #2	Sow #2	—
May 20	Sow #3	—	—	Sow #1
Jun 3	Sow #4	Sow #3	Sow #3	—
Jun 10	—	—	—	Sow #2
Jun 17	Sow #5	Sow #4	—	—
Jul 1	Sow #6	Sow #5	—	Sow #3
Jul 15	Sow #7	Sow #6	Fall #1	—
Aug 1	Sow #8	Sow #7	Fall #2	—

Sample Zone 7a Schedule

Last frost Apr 15, first frost Oct 25 — a 193-day growing season. Notice the earlier start and later fall sowings.

Sow Date	Lettuce	Radish	Spinach	Beans
Apr 1	Sow #1	Sow #1	Sow #1	—
Apr 15	Sow #2	Sow #2	—	—
Apr 25	—	Sow #3	Sow #2	Sow #1
May 10	Sow #3	—	—	—
May 20	—	Sow #4	Sow #3	Sow #2
Jun 3	Sow #4	Sow #5	—	—
Jun 17	Sow #5	—	—	Sow #3
Jul 1	Sow #6	Sow #6	—	Sow #4
Jul 15	Sow #7	Sow #7	—	—
Aug 1	Sow #8	Sow #8	Fall #1	Sow #5
Aug 15	Sow #9	Sow #9	Fall #2	—
Sep 1	Sow #10	Sow #10	Fall #3	—

Practical Tips

Label everything. Mark each sowing with the date and sow number so you can track what's where. A $2 pack of plant markers saves hours of confusion.

Adjust for heat. Lettuce and spinach bolt in summer heat. Skip mid-summer sowings in zones 7a and warmer, or use heat-tolerant varieties like 'Jericho' lettuce or 'Bloomsdale Long Standing' spinach.

Pre-soak large seeds. Beans and peas germinate faster with 8–12 hours of soaking before planting. This can cut 3–5 days off emergence time.

Rotate beds. Don't sow the same crop in the same bed repeatedly. Rotate to prevent soil depletion and disease buildup. When one sowing is harvested, that's bed space for the next crop.

Use the harvest gap. Succession planting works best alongside crop rotation. As early-season crops come out (spring peas, first lettuce), replant that space with warm-season or fall crops.

Don't count calendar weeks — count frost-free weeks. A Zone 7a gardener has ~28 frost-free weeks vs. ~22 in Zone 5b. That's 6 extra weeks of succession sowing. GrowSmart calculates this per city, so your schedule matches your actual season — not a generic estimate.

> GrowSmart Tip: GrowSmart's succession engine auto-calculates every sowing date across your full growing season. It factors in your city's frost dates, each crop's DTM, heat sensitivity, and recommended sowing intervals. Pro users get spring, summer, and fall schedules with every sow date mapped out.

Ready to automate your planting schedule?

GrowSmart builds personalized timelines based on your city's frost dates — spring, summer, and fall.

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