

# February Veggie Garden

by [giantveggiegardener](#)

February is upon us and although for most of us gardeners it is a quieter time of year, there are still things we can start to do to prepare for this coming season.

**WEATHERBUG-** I look at a weather app on my phone daily; I like to water on warmer days when the hose doesn't freeze and empty it afterwards. I can see if the weather is warmer or a cold front coming or snow or rain. This way I can tell when I should water the garden. If snow is coming, I don't have to water the garden. This year I started writing down the days we get rain or snow and how much. Otherwise, I've learned I will forget. Writing it down helps me see when I should water again.

I water once a month on average in winter. In January, it was cold some days and some days warmer-a real mixed bag but little snow so far this winter. February is our coldest month, so one more month to go before it warms up.

**Daylight hours** are now over ten hours a day from **January 15<sup>th</sup>** on. And even though the winter solstice was in December and the days started getting longer, we still had less than 10 hours of daylight for the plants to start growing again until January 15. Now you can see when the perennials start growing again.

## **I want to talk about SEEDS and PLANTING**

### **GERMINATION RATE**

Winter is the time when most of us are busy ordering seeds to get ready for the next growing season. I went through my packets of seeds and discarded anything that was over the life expectancy of the seeds and ordered fresh seed so I get better germination. There should be a date stamped on the seed packets that tell us what date they were packaged. If there isn't a date, I write on the seed packet the year I bought it. There are many charts out on the internet that give us the life expectancy of vegetable seeds. The germination rate will go down as the seed gets older. So how do we tell the viability of the seeds?

### **VIABILITY TEST**

Every seed has a shelf life. Generally, I don't worry about the viability or germination of seeds if they are 2-3 years old or younger, but I do look at a seed viability chart as well. For older seeds, here's how to test the **viability or germination rate** of your seeds.

**Plant 10 seeds and see how many germinate.** If you have 9 seeds germinate, then you have 90% germination rate vs if you have 2 seeds germinate, you have 20% germination rate and should probably buy new seeds of that variety. I will however keep seeds that I deem valuable or ones that are unusual past their expiration dates. For these, I might grow out some plants, let them produce seeds and harvest the new seeds. You can keep seeds from plants that are either heirlooms or OP (open-pollinated), both of which will produce true seeds. They will grow out to be what they are supposed to be. Hybrid (F1) seeds will not grow out to be true.

### **DAYS TO HARVEST**

Information on vegetable seed packages usually contains the number of **days to harvest**. However, that number is not an absolute. Many factors can influence days to harvest. Growing plants in northern New Mexico is challenging since much of our region is described as short-season. Our season has cooler growing conditions in the spring and then the temperature suddenly rises, and we basically jump into summer. So, there is not much spring before the summer heat hits.

The **days to harvest** printed on seed packets are a guideline and usually give a range, for example, lettuce could be between like 30-45 days. or later depending on the variety.

### **My deciding factor is finding the variety I want.**

Length of time needed to reach plant maturity is most often related to environmental conditions such as air temperature, soil temperature at time of planting, watering practices & soil fertility. All these can influence maturity date. The day to harvest info is important because it can provide generalized differences among varieties.

For example, consider tomato varieties with ratings of 58, 65 and 80 days to harvest. It's likely there may be little to no difference in maturity dates between the 58 and 65-day tomato varieties, but the 58-day tomato variety will probably mature earlier than the one rated 80 days.

For this reason, I grow tomatoes that are early season, mid-season and a few that are late season. I rarely plant tomato seeds that take 100 days to harvest because they may freeze before they are ready to harvest in late fall.

Keep records of the varieties you plant, the planting date and how many days to harvest. By doing this you can plant your favorite varieties of vegetables year after year and have a much better idea of how many growing days are needed before they are ready to harvest.

### **GROWING GREENS-The first crops of the season**

**Most people wait too long to start greens, and they bolt before they are ready to eat. So frustrating!**

So, for me, I will start cold weather crops like spinach, arugula and some lettuces in early February, inside my house, under lights with NO heat mats. (Be sure to **clean and sterilize any used containers** for seed starting or transplanting seedlings. Use a 10% bleach to water ratio to rinse off the containers.)

### **SOIL-what potting soil should you use?**

**To start seeds and for transplanting, I use to get 'Batch 66-Moonshine' from Agua Fria nursery here in Santa Fe but now it's called, 'WHITE LIGHTNING. Same great product, a different name. Only at Agua Fria Nursery here in town.**

This stuff is great. It comes with all the amendments your plants will need, and they will grow faster in this soil. You will have to moisten it before using. I use to buy seed germination soil and then planting soil but now I use the WHITE LIGHTNING for both. Some plant soils are so heavy and always stay wet so you might consider changing out to this as it dries out nicely between watering.

I will transplant the seedlings out of their germination trays (**I use a 20-row seed germination tray**) and into pony packs once they get their first true leaves.

I don't start them in pony packs as they take too long to germinate, and you take the **risk of the soil being too wet and rotting the seeds**. Believe it or not you want a soil that will dry out every few days. I transplant them again out of the pony packs and into my unheated green house or cold frame by early March. I still must put row cover over them at night (and sometimes 2 row covers over them) so they don't freeze at night. In the morning, I pull back the row covers unless the weather is bitter cold. I have had some of the best greens ever doing this. If you don't have a greenhouse, you can easily make a mini hoop house out of a raised bed and putting plastic over some PVC pipes and grow inside it. Just remember to open up the ends in the day as they can get very warm inside.