



## **Biosphere Consulting, LLC**

14908 Tilden Road— Winter Garden FL 34787

(407) 656-8277

[www.BiosphereNursery.com](http://www.BiosphereNursery.com)

### **Planning the Home Garden**

Newcomers to Florida are often confused as they plan a home garden because the timing is very different here compared to northern climates. Few vegetables do really well in the mid-summer and others, like tomatoes, must be squeezed between the hot summer months and first frost. Our sandy soils also may require more additives, primarily organic material, to hold moisture.

Harvesting vegetables that are home grown can be very rewarding and help lower food costs as well as carbon footprints. The fact that they were not grown in a foreign country where pesticide regulation may not be strict enough, perhaps harvested by workers without enforced cleanliness and then shipped here using high energy levels, should be worth a great deal to the happy gardener.

The first step is to choose the right site within your landscape. The most important factor is light and the site should have at least six hours of direct sunlight. A source of water is also important.

Next, a good plan should be formulated, showing what vegetables you want to grow and where you want to grow each one. Next, a planting calendar should be organized. Decide whether you want to plant directly in the ground or whether you want to use raised beds. If you build raised beds, use Hardy-Board or, if you can use wood, make sure it is not pressure treated with arsenic compounds.

Soil preparation is important and sandy soils should have organic matter such as compost (a good compost pile is well worth doing), rotted leaves or worm castings. Our favorite at Biosphere is a mixture of worm castings and composted cow manure. Mixed with sandy soil it will provide an excellent growing medium.

Because most compost is low in nitrogen, some fertilizers should be used also, using a balanced formula such as 6-6-6 or 8-8-8. Both inorganic and organic fertilizers are available.

Soil pH is also important, with the best range for most vegetables ranging from pH 5.8 to 6.3 (slight) acid. (A pH of 7.0 is neutral, lower than that is acid and higher than that is alkaline). You can usually get soils pH tested at the local County Extension service or simple kits are available. A pH that is too low (acid) can be adjusted using lime but care should be taken not to use too much. A high pH can be adjusted somewhat using granular sulfur.

Water when necessary and use mulch to decrease water requirements. We like oak leaves because they serve to control weeds and decrease watering and they break down throughout the year to provide organic compost for next years garden. Weed control is the best accomplished by hand pulling.

Pest and disease control may be problematic but the diligent gardener can exert control without using toxic pesticides. Expert scouting is important, looking for diseased leaves or pests. Removing them quickly is the best action.

The following calendar represents our best experiences in testing garden plots. Some vegetables are more difficult than others but all on this list are practical in Central Florida.

**Happy gardening for you and the critters!**

# CALENDAR

## January

**Plant directly in the garden:** Beets, Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Carrots, Radishes, Cauliflower, Cabbage, Collards, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Spinach, Turnips, Herbs. **Plant in protected hot beds for transplant after frost danger:** Tomato, Cucumber, Eggplant, Squash

## February

**Plant:** All types listed above in January, potatoes, Onion sets, Early Peas, Sugar Peas. **After mid February:** Beans, Cantalope, Corn, Cucumber (seeds), Peppers, Watermelon

## March

**Plant:** Beans, Corn, Cantalope, Cucumbers (seed or transplants started earlier), Okra

## April

**Plant:** Pole Beans, Lima Beans, Collards, Okra, Summer Squash, Watermelon, Cherry Tomatoes (heat tolerant varieties) Sweet Potatoes, Chayote, Lettuce, Onion sets, Parsley

## May

**Plant:** Snap Peas, Lima Beans, Carrots, Cabbage, Celery, Chives, Cucumber, Okra, Melons, Peas, Peppers, Radish, Chayote, Jicama, Okra, Southern Peas, Sweet Potato, Eggplant

## June

**Plant:** Chayote, Okra, Southern Peas, Sweet Potato, (Anything you plant now must be heat tolerant). **“Solarize” empty beds:** when you remove a crop during the summer, cover it with clear plastic after you moisten the soil. This will kill the weed seeds and soil nematodes and your bed will be ready for the fall planting.

## July

**Plant:** Okra, Black-eyed Peas, Eggplant, Peppers. **Start seeds for transplant in the fall:** tomato, eggplant, pepper (We prefer putting them in 4-inch pots or larger cell-packs). **“Solarize” empty beds.**

## August

**Plant:** Bush Beans, Pole Beans, Lima Beans, Collards, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Peppers, Squash  
**Transplant starter tomatoes. Prepare beds early in the month. Till new beds.**

## September

**Plant early in the month:** Beans, Corn, Cucumber, Eggplant, Peppers, Peas, Squash, Tomato transplanting

**Plant last of the month:** Broccoli, Cabbage, Celery, Collard, Endive, Lettuce, Mustard, Onion, Radish, Strawberry, Turnip, Carrot, Beets. **Plant seeds for baby salad greens for “cut and come again” salad garden.**

## October

**Plant:** Beets, Broccoli, Cabbage, Celery, Collard, Endive, Lettuce, Mustard, Onions, Parsley, Peas, Radish, Spinach, Strawberries, Turnips, Baby greens

## November

**Plant:** Beets, Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celery, Collards, Endive, Lettuce, Mustard greens, Onions, Radish, Peas, Spinach, Turnips, Baby greens

## December

**Plant:** Beets, Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Lettuce, Mustard greens, Onions, Peas, Radishes, Spinach, Arugula, Dill, Fennel, Garlic, Oregano, Parsley, Thyme.